NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

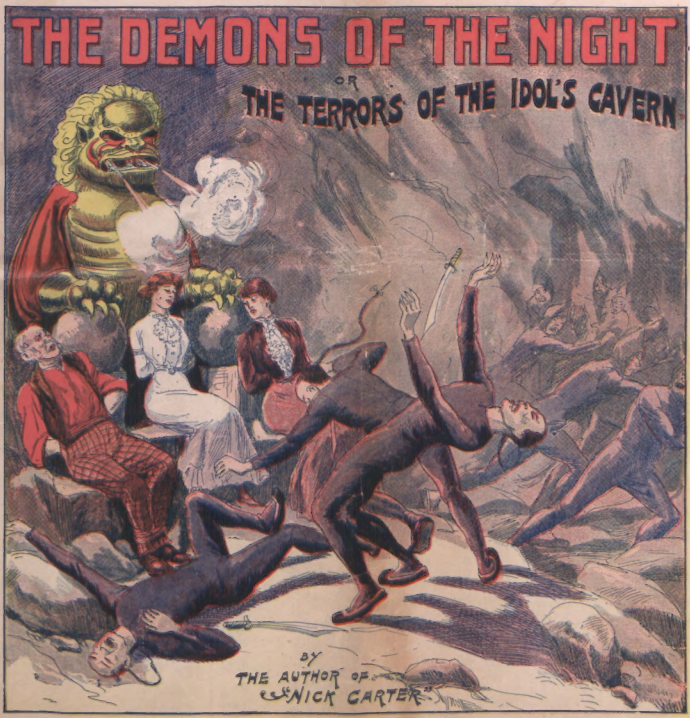
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 405. Price, Five Cents.

THE DEMONS OF THE NIGHT

OR

THE TERRORS OF THE IDOL'S CAVERN



BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."

Three sharp reports rang out from the revolver of Nick Carter, concealed within the image of Siva, and the three Chinamen sank in their tracks to the rocky floor of the cave.

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THE DEMONS OF THE NIGHT;

OR,

The Terrors of the Idol's Cavern.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AGNES LYNWOOD'S DISAPPEARANCE.

"Do you remember me, Mr. Carter?"

"Perfectly well, Mr. Moran. You gave me some valuable information in connection with my search for the human demons who committed those strange murders in the park. You are Edward Moran, Jr. What can I do for you?"

"I want you to help me, if you will."

"I certainly will, if I can. What do you wish me to do?"

"Help me to find Agnes Lynwood."

"Who is Agnes Lynwood?"

"She is the young lady to whom I referred when I gave you a more or less graphic account of the attack upon us while we were crossing the little patch of wood between the two paths in the park.* You will remember that I requested you not to require me to give her name, unless it was important that you should have it."

"Ah! yes. Well, what has become of her, since you wish me to help you to find her? Has she run away?"

"She has disappeared."

"Indeed! Since when?"

"Since three days ago."

"Three days ago? Why, that was the day following the night when Chick and I captured the murderers of Flora Mason and Dora Delmar, in the park."

"Yes, sir."

"Has no report been made of her disappearance? I have seen nothing of one."

*See No. 404 of the Nick Carter Library, "The Trail of the Vampire."

"I do not think it has been reported."

"No? That is rather strange. Hasn't she parents?"

"She has a mother."

"Why hasn't her mother reported it, then?"

"Because the mother believes that the daughter ran away with me."

"Ah! I see. Thinks that you ran off together, were married, and that you are now keeping her daughter in hiding until the wrath blows over; is that it?"

"That is exactly the case."

"And is there any truth in it?"

"I scarcely regard it as necessary to ask me that question."

"No? I may ask you a good many questions for which you will not see the necessity. Is there any truth in it?"

"None whatever."

"Is there any foundation for that beilef on the part of the mother?"

"Yes; I am sorry to say that there is considerable."

"Indeed. I will touch upon that point again later."

"Very good, sir."

"How old is Agnes?"

"Seventeen."

"And your own age?"

"Twenty-three."

"You don't look it, Edward."

"Still that is my age."

"Now, I take it that you and Agnes were, and for that matter still are, very much in love with each other?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that Agnes' mother objected to it?"

"With every breath she breathed."

"Why?"

"She does not think that I am good enough for Agnes."

"Well, are you?"

"Indeed I am not. Nobody on earth could be good enough for her. Agnes believes that I am, however."

"Well, if she believes it, and you are sure that you are not, but are willing to try all your life to be so, then that about settles it, doesn't it?"

"That is what we think, Mr. Carter."

"I suppose that Mrs. Lynwood also thought her daughter too young to have a lover?"

"I am perfectly willing to wait until Agnes is twenty."

"Indeed! That is a good while; three years, Edward."

"A hundred would not be too long to wait for Agnes Lynwood."

"Humph! You might both be a little gray by that time," said Nick, smiling.

"I suppose so; of course, I exaggerated when I said a——"

"Yes, yes; I know. What did the mother say when you told her you were willing to wait till Agnes is twenty."

"She said it would make no difference if I waited till she was forty; her objection would be just as positive."

"And it was then, I suppose, when you threatened to run away with Agnes, eh?"

"Yes, sir. But not in the way you think."

"No? How then?"

"I told her that I would wait till Agnes was twenty-one and then we would get married without her consent."

"What did she say to that?"

"Said that she would lock her daughter up so that she could not get away; that it would make no difference whether Agnes was twenty-one or forty-one, that she would still be her daughter, and that she would under no circumstances ever give her consent to such a marriage."

"She evidently does not like you, Edward."

"Oh, the old lady likes me well enough. She says she likes me. It is her fault as much as anybody's that Agnes and I were thrown so much together, always. Mrs. Lynwood is very fond of me, and I love her almost as much as I do Agnes."

"Well, well! You don't say so. What in the world is the matter, then?"

"My name."

"Your name?"

"Yes; Moran. She objects to it. She says she could not rest in her grave if her daughter bore such a terrible name as that."

"She would rather it were Heathcote, or Titherington, or Featherstoneaugh, I suppose."

"Infinitely."

"About how old is Mrs. Lynwood, Edward?"

"She is thirty-seven; just twenty years older than Agnes."

"Great Scott! Is she? Really as old as that? That is why you just now referred to her as 'the old lady,' I suppose."

"That was a slip, Mr. Carter. It is a sort of pet name that I have for her, when I want to tease her."

"I see; and you are very fond of her—the mother, I mean—and she is very fond of you, eh? Is that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now she charges you with having run away with Agnes, does she?"

"Just that."

"Humph! Agnes, you say, disappeared three days ago?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about that part of it."

"It happened at Lynwood Hall."

"Where is that?"

"On the north shore of Long Island. It is out a little beyond Hempstead Bay."

"Well, tell me about it. Tell me exactly how it happened—that is if you know how it happened."

"Of course, I do not know how it happened. I only know what I was told, for I was not there at the time."

"Where were you?"

"Here in the city. Agnes and her mother had gone down to the Hall. They went down immediately after the murders of Flora Mason and Dora Delmar;* Mrs. Lynwood said that she did not wish her daughter ever again to visit the park, and she thought the safest way to keep her out of it was to take her away from it."

"Quite right. What happened then?"

"This is the story as it was told to me: On the evening of the day Agnes disappeared, she was seated in the library of the house with her mother. It was getting dark, but there was still some daylight; it was not dark enough to light the rooms. Agnes said she was going out for a breath of air, and she stepped through the window and leaped to the ground, which was only about three feet under the window."

"Well?"

"That was the last that was seen of her. Her mother dropped asleep in her chair, so it was more than an hour before she missed Agnes, and even then she did not miss her, but supposed her to be somewhere about the grounds, which are very extensive. She called a servant and sent him to find her, but the servant returned after a while and reported that Miss Agnes, as she is called, could not be found. Then the other servants were called upon and a general search was instituted. Not a trace of Agnes could be found anywhere other than that the book she had been reading was discovered upon her favorite seat, down at the boat house."

"Go on."

"That is all, sir, unless you care to hear the gossip of the gardener, who was very fond of her."

"Of course, I care to hear it. I wish to hear everything connected with the case at all, and whatever gossip there may be, particularly. But first, what is the point of his gossiping? What does it portend? Tell me that?"

"Why, sir, the substance of what he says would indicate that Agnes was abducted by an imaginary lot of beings whom he calls 'the Demons of the Night.'"

CHAPTER II.

THE GARDENER'S SUPERSTITION.

"The Demons of the Night," said Nick Carter, repeating after young Moran. "And what, may I ask, are the Demons of the Night?"

"Something, I think, which exists only in the imagination of the gardener of Lynwood Hall."

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 404.

"He must have some reason for the use of such a phrase."

"I suppose he has—or thinks he has. The old man has been at Lynwood so many years that he has peopled it with all sorts of ghosts; and among them, and by no means the least ghostly, are the Demons of the Night."

"What do you know about them?"

"Nothing at all."

"What is the story which the gardener tells you, in reference to their being accountable for the disappearance of Agnes Lynwood?"

"He merely asserts that they carried her off."

"Has he no reason—that is, no definite reason, for making that assertion?"

"Nothing which I would call a definite reason."

"What is the gardener's name?"

"Mike. I don't think he has a last name; if he has I have never heard it."

"Well, this occasion of the disappearance of Agnes is not the first time he has referred to the Demons of the Night, is it?"

"Certainly not."

"When did you first hear about them?"

"As long ago as I can remember, almost. I have visited Lynwood Hall at intervals ever since I was a child, and I do not remember a time when Mike did not talk in whispers about his demons. Nobody around the place pays any attention to him when he gets on that subject."

"It isn't a new idea of his, then?"

"By no means. I think it is as old as he is."

"Have you been to see Mrs. Lynwood since the disappearance of Agnes?"

"Certainly; I went down there at once."

"And she charged you with knowing where her daughter is?"

"Yes; and the strange part of it is that she will not accept any other theory. She is so positive that Agnes went away with me, that she is much more angry than frightened about the affair. She pays no heed whatever to my protestations; and when I told her that I intended to call upon you for assistance in the matter, she ordered me from the place, saying that she would have to wait a long time before she could forgive either of us. That is as much as I know about it."

"Now, Edward, as a matter of fact, have you any idea at all where Agnes is?"

"No, sir; I have not."

"What is your own idea of the disappearance? You do not appear to be very greatly exercised over it. You are not as worried as you should be, under the circumstances."

"Like Mrs. Lynwood, I am more angry than worried."

"Why?"

"Because I think that Agnes' mother knows where she is."

"Ah! I see. You think that the mother has spirited the daughter away in order to get her out of your reach."

"Yes, sir; that is exactly what I think."

"And in spite of that fact, you wish me to find her for you."

"It is quite natural that I should wish to know where she is," replied Moran. "I know, for one thing, that Agnes would not consent to remain away from me for any length of time, without letting me know where she is. Mrs. Lynwood claims that I have taken her daughter away. Now there is always a possibility that, since Mrs. Lynwood is apparently wrong in her stated surmise, I may also be wrong in mine, and that Agnes may really have met with an accident, or have fallen into danger of some kind. The point is——"

"I see the point quite plainly, and it is well taken, Edward. It is not at all likely, under the circumstances, that Mrs. Lynwood would care to have me snooping around Lynwood Hall, is it?"

"She certainly repudiated the idea of my calling you into the case."

"Then——"

They were interrupted by a tap at the door, and the detective's youngest assistant announced that Nick Carter was wanted for a moment; and when he had passed through the door and closed it, Patsy continued:

"At the telephone, chief. It is a Mrs. Lynwood who wants to talk to you."

"Ah!" said Nick; and he hastened to his private room where the receiver was standing upon the table awaiting him.

He placed it against his ear and said:

"Hello! This is Mr. Carter. Who wants me?"

"I am Mrs. Lynwood," was the reply. "I am at my country seat on Long Island—Lynwood Hall."

"Yes; and in what way can I serve you, Mrs. Lynwood?"

"Could you come down here to-day?" was the next question.

"Yes; I think so, if it is important that I should do so. What is the trouble?"

"My daughter has disappeared. The circumstances are somewhat strange. At first I convinced myself that she had gone away of her own free will, but now I am getting anxious lest I have made a mistake. I hope you can come here at once."

"I think I can be there about two o'clock this afternoon, Mrs. Lynwood."

"Thank you. I will have a carriage at the station to meet you."

"No. Please do not do that. I prefer to arrive without any heralding. You need not mention to anybody that I am coming or that you have sent for me, only be prepared to see me, between two and three this afternoon."

"Very well, sir."

"Is that all, for the present, Mrs. Lynwood?"

"I wished merely to add that in case young Mr. Edward Moran should call upon you in regard to the same matter, during the day, I would like you to question him very closely. It is possible that he may know where my daughter is."

"I think I understand you, Mrs. Lynwood," replied Nick. "I will do so. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver before more could be said on either side, and in a moment more was back in the room where he had left Edward Moran.

"Edward," he said, "I think I ought to be frank with you, for you have impressed me with being a very earnest and sincere young man."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter."

"I was called out to reply to a telephone call from Mrs. Lynwood."

"From Mrs. Lynwood?"

"Yes. I think, judging by the sound of her voice and the evident anxiety it expressed, that she was sincere when she charged you with abducting Agnes, and that she has had no hand in it. I am inclined to believe, Edward, that Agnes has really disappeared, and that, without the connivance of either of you."

"But—my God, Mr. Carter! If that is so, where has she gone? Where is she?"

"We cannot answer that question now, Edward."

"Nothing could happen to her there, at Lynwood, without the connivance of her mother, sir."

"And her mother believes that nothing could have happened to her there without your connivance."

Edward was silent for a moment, thinking. When he raised his head again, presently, he asked:

"Are you going to Lynwood Hall?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once."

"May I go with you?"

"No; but you may appear there—indeed, I wish you to appear there late this afternoon."

"At any time you say, sir."

"I would like you to be there at five o'clock. I am going at once. I shall arrive there about noon, or a little before, but I shall not report to Mrs. Lynwood until two. In the meantime, I can look around me, talk with the gardener, and in other ways find out the general lay of the land. I will want you at five o'clock."

"I will be there, sir. But will it be right for me to go again so soon after I have been ordered never to show my face there again?"

"You will be received. You need have no anxiety on that account. Now, Edward, a few questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you suppose it possible that Agnes could have done this thing herself, for the sake of a prank upon you both?"

"No; I do not."

"Are you positive in your own mind that she has not gone away of her own accord?"

"Absolutely so, sir."

"Then it follows that something has happened to her. You say her book was discovered on a bench at the boat house. It is evident, then, that she went there after leaving her mother. Could Agnes swim?"

"Like a fish. She is the best swimmer I ever saw, for a girl."

"So, if she had fallen into the bay——"

"She would have swum out again without any trouble whatever."

"Even with all her clothing on her?"

"Yes; even so."

"Then, my lad, it follows that there may be something in this legend of the gardener's about the Demons of the Night. Do you know what they are? Or, rather, what Mike believes them to be?"

"Merely a lot of shadowy forms which he has seen around the place after nightfall. He claims that he has seen them often, and that they inevitably disappear at the foot of a huge bluff which overlooks the bay; at a place, in fact, where it would be impossible for anything to disappear at all."

"Humph!" said Nick. "There may be more to these so-called Demons of the Night than we think. At all events, Mike's superstition about them must be investigated. Demons of the Night is an ill-sounding name, Edward, and let us hope that Agnes Lynwood has not fallen into the hands of such a people."

CHAPTER III.

"IF WE ARE MEN, WE WILL RESCUE HER."

When Nick Carter arrived in the neighborhood of Lynwood, he had no difficulty in ascertaining the last name of the gardener, Mike. He proved to be a character who was well known in the locality, and he bore no less a name than O'Toole.

The detective had arrayed himself in a costume which sufficiently gave the impression that he was but lately arrived from the "other side," and in that guise he scaled the walls which surrounded the extensive grounds, and presently, as if he had risen from the earth on the spot, he presented himself before the astonished Mike.

"Hello, Mike," he said. "Is it you?"

"It is," replied Mike; "no less. And who may you be?"

"I'm Tim," said Nick.

"Tim, is it? Tim who?"

"Tim O'Toole, no less."

"Sure," said Mike, scratching his head in perplexity, "I never heard tell of a Tim O'Toole on this side of the wather or the other."

"Then, bedad, you've learned something this day, for I am Tim O'Toole."

"And who was your father, Tim?"

"My uncle's brother; no less; and by the same token he was husband to me mother. I come from the west coast—from the river Shannon, and they told me that me cousin, Mike, was here, pullin' weeds an' consortin' wid the Demons of the Night, so——"

"Whist, laddie! Sure, whin ye make use of that term, whisper it."

"Is it true, then, Mike?"

"True, is it? Sure do you think I would be for manufacturing a whole rigmarole out av nothin' at all? True, is it? Ay, it's true enough. Faith, Tim, are ye come here all the way from the old country to laugh at old Mike?"

"Laugh, is it? Narry a laugh, Mike. No; I came to work with you a few days; to help you round the place while there is a lot to do, and niver a penny do I want save only a few paraties to eat, and a shed to sleep in overnight. Mebby you'll take me on for a few days, till I git my bearings and know where to go."

"That I will, Tim, sure. Do ye know anything about gardening?"

"Don't I? Wasn't I raised on the old O'Malley place, and didn't I work all me life on the place, pullin' weeds and trimmin' roses till you couldn't rest? Sure I know about gardening."

"Then you can begin on that bed there; when you get that done, I'll send you to something else."

Without another word Nick removed his coat and

fell to work, and for the following half hour there was scarcely a word spoken between them.

Nick knew that the best way in which to gain the confidence of the old man was not to seek it, but to wait for it to come of its own accord, and, presently, when they had weeded several of the beds, Mike filled his pipe and seated himself on the grass while he watched, with severe eyes, the work of his new recruit.

The detective worked on in silence, never raising his head, and at last the patience of the old man was exhausted.

"Tim," he said.

"That's me, Mike," replied the detective.

"Have ye a tongue in your head?"

"I have that."

"Have ye forgotten how to use it?"

"I have not."

"Mebby it's tired and you're restin' it."

"Faith, 'tis Tim O'Toole that knows better than to kape his tongue a waggin' in the presence of his employer," replied Nick.

Mike was visibly pleased by this reply; but he waited a whole minute before he spoke again.

"Have ye a pipe wid you?" he asked then.

"I have that."

"And tobacco, too, mebby."

"Narry a bit, Mike; an' no coin to buy it with," replied Nick, still bending over the weeds and continuing to pull them with the same care he had exercised from the start.

"Mebby ye'd like to smoke," said Mike, after another pause.

"I would that."

"There's tobacco in me coat there, on the grass, and here is a good seat beside me on the turf," said Mike, insinuatingly.

"Do ye mane that I kin rest alongside of you while we talk together and have a little smoke for the good of our bodies? Is that it?" asked Nick.

"That's it, Tim."

"Sure, then, I'll take ye at your word;" and Nick straightened up, secured the tobacco from the gardener's coat, filled his pipe, lighted it, and seated himself on the ground beside him.

"Whin did you come over?" asked Mike.

"Last week, no less."

"And what have you been doing since that time?"

"Nothin' at all, at all."

"Who told you that I was here?"

"Rory O'Goegheghan, of Athlone," replied Nick, at a venture, manufacturing a name with the rapidity of thought.

"Rory, was it?" said Mike. "Sure, I know no Rory. There was a Terrence and a Michael, but I remimber no Rory."

"Mebby he was born afther you left the old parts," said Nick. "He is a youngish man now; not much older than I am."

"Faith, that must be it; was it Rory who told you about the little Demons av the Night?"

'It was. He said you had writ home about it in a letter which the parish priest wrote for you."

"It's a lie," said Mike, placidly. "Sure the father wouldn't write a word about them, and he only made fun of me whin I axed him. 'Twas Miss Aggie who writ the letter."

"Who may she be, Mike?"

"An angel, no less," said Mike.

"Your swateheart, mebby," ventured the pseudo Tim.

"Whist, lad! Would I be afther havin' a swateheart at my age?"

"Why not? Sure, you might be me own brother from the looks of you," said Nick, with soft blarney. "Who is she, then, this Miss Aggie?"

"She's the mistress' colleen; and an angel if there war ever one without wings."

"Faith, I'd like to see her," said Nick.

"Sure, Tim; so would I." He paused a moment, then, as if to be sure of what he said next, and then, in a half whisper, he added:

"The divils have got her, Tim."

"Whist, yourself, Mike! What is it you're afther tellin' me?"

"The truth, no less, Tim."

"Do ye mane thim divils av the night?"

"That's what I mane. They've got her. I saw 'em."

"And do you mean to tell me, Mike O'Toole, that ye stood lookin' on while the Demons av the Night carried away your angel, and that ye never raised a hand to stop them?"

"Raised a hand, is it?" exclaimed Mike, angrily, resentful of the implication upon his courage. "Sure, didn't I see her down by the boathouse, and didn't I see the little divils come up out av the say in the half dark, wid their bodies all aflame wid the flames of brimstone? And didn't I see thim swarm around her like flies and lape into the say wid her? And didn't I run me two legs almost off me, strivin' to git to her? And didn't I have me spade in me hand a wavin' it? And wouldn't I have fought wid the hull hell's boilin' av thim if I could have got to thim? And whin I got to the little wharf at the boathouse where she had been sitting, wasn't she, and all the little demons what grabbed her gone clean out av me sight intirely? Sure, they gave me no chanst to fight wid 'em, at all, at all."

"Did you see that?" asked the pseudo Tim.

"I did that; every bit av it."

"Tell me about it, Mike."

"Sure, haven't I told you about it just now."

"Show me the place where you saw it?"

"I'll do that. Come here."

He seized Nick by the arm and led him across the garden to a place from which they could get a clear view of the boathouse.

"I stood right here," said Mike. "I saw Miss Aggie jump, out of the window av the house—see, that one behind the lilac bush—and she had a book in her hand, and she was half runnin' like. She likes to sit on that bench on the wharf and she went straight toward it and seated herself there. It was gittin' dark so she couldn't read and she sat down on the bench and looked off at the wather dramin'. It was her way, Tim."

"Sure! Mebby she was seein' sperrits off there in the gathering darkness."

"Sperrits? Divils, more likely. The wather's full av thim."

"I never heard av divils living in the wather," said Nick, thoughtfully. "Fire, mebby; but never in wather."

"These do; and by the same token they carry the fire wid 'em to kape off the damp, for ivry time I see thim, they're all ablaze wid a blue flame shootin' up all over their bodies. And don't they dive into the wather and disappear? And don't they come out av the wather?"

"Sure, Mike; I have an idea," said Nick.

"What is it?"

"Git his riverence to bless the wather. Faith, they couldn't live in it then. They'd come out av it like wather out av a sponge; and thin——"

"Sure, I thought of that. But his riverence only laughed at me. He said it would be a sinful waste av holy wather to bless the whole bay, and I'd have to catch my divils some other way."

"And what thin, Mike? Go on wid the story."

"Well, she sat there, dramin', an' me a standin' here, thinking. I was wondering if it was safe for her to sit there with the divils all around her and likely to come out at any minute, and I was jist going down to her to tell her that she had better come away, when the demons appeared all around her, all of a sudden."

"Where did they come from?"

"Sure, didn't I tell you they came out av the wather?"

"And how many was there?"

"As many as you could count on your two hands, no less."

"What did they look like?"

"Like divils, sure."

"Like men, too?"

"Sure like men. They don't make divils av horses, do they?"

"Ax me auntie; sure I don't know. What did they do then?"

"They grabbed her; and she let out a scream that you could have heard a mile."

"And then?"

"They dragged her to the end of the wharf; I saw

them wrap something around her. It was like a cloak only it was all black and glossy, and it blazed with the same fires of hades that they wear on their own clothes; and then, begorra, they laped into the say wid her."

"Whist!" said Nick. "They wouldn't drown her and thimselves, too."

"Drown, is it? Faith, didn't I tell you they live in the wather?"

"But she couldn't live in the wather, if they do?"

"Faith, they took her there anyway; and whin I got there, there wasn't a ripple."

"Are you sure, Mike, that ye didn't run the other way first?" asked Nick, slowly. "How soon was it afther they l'aped inty the wather that you got there? Tell the truth, now, on your blessed soul!"

"Well, Tim, mebby I did run the other way at first. Sure, I ain't got no call to be chasin' afther divils who live in the wather and who go around all covered wid blazin' fire; but I got there as soon as I could, and there wasn't a ripple on the wather nor a sign of Miss Aggie to be seen anywhere. And so I say, Tim, the Iverns of the Night have got her; no less."

"Mebby so, Mike; mebby so," replied Nick. "But sure, if she's an angel, they can't hurt her; and by the same token, if we are men, we'll find her and rescue her, even if a thousand devils and all the fires of hell stand in our way. Shall we shake hands on that, Mike?"

"We will," said Mike.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LETTER FROM THE DEMONS.

"You say that there are as many as ten of them?" said Nick.

"Are the divils? Sure. Sometimes I see three or four; sometimes there are half a dozen; and then again there'll be as many as ye could count on your two hands."

"Do you always see them down near the boat-house?"

"No, but there more often than anywhere else. Sure they're anywhere at all about the old place, only they are always near to the wather, or at laste they go for the wather as soon as they know I see them."

"So they are aware of the fact that you see them, are they?"

"Faith, they are that. Don't they come into my little loft over the toolhouse some nights and talk to me? And don't they say to me that if I tell what they do they'll blister me with brimstone for the rest av me days? Sure, they overrun the place, and wanct whin I was on the point av packing me duds and skipping out in order to git rid av thim, didn't they come to me little room while I was in bed, and didn't they stand around it and tell me that if I left the place they'd follow me and bring me back, and then they'd take me down under the wather to where they live, and kape me there, and roast me till I was the color of thimselves?"

"What color are they, Mike?"

"Faith, I dunno. Sometimes I think they are as black as nagurs; thin again I think they are red; thin they look soter yellow, and sure I dunno what color they are, only that they ain't white at all, at all, like we are."

"And they come to your room?"

"They do that."

"Often?"

"No, thank the blessed Virgin!"

"And have you seen any of them since they captured Miss Agnes?"

"Not a sign of them. Not a hair of them."

"Are they big men? As big as we are?"

"Purty near; mebby not quite so big."

"And how are they dressed, Mike?"

"In tights, no less. Sure they wear only one garment, and that stretches from their heads to their feet, like the pictures you see av the divil, only they don't wear the horns and the tail; and it's all black, except where the blue flames dart around it all. Faith, Tim, to tell you the truth, I don't look at them much. I stick me head under the bedclothes and wait till they're gone."

"When did you first see them, Mike? How long ago was it?"

"Sure, it's two years or more now, since they first came to me."

"Tell me about that first time."

"There's mighty little to tell, Tim. I hadn't been here but a short time when one night I heard a noise down by the boathouse. I got up out av me bed to see what it was, and whin I was down there lookin' around me in the dark, I raised me head of a sudden and found that they were all around me. I was that frightened that I let out a yell, and when I yelled, they all chuckled and laughed, as if it amused thim."

"An' what did you do then?"

"Sure, I got down on me two knees and told thim I was Mike O'Toole and that I had never harrumed no man in me life; and at that they laughed ag'in; and sure, Tim, they tied me two hands together behind me back, and me two feet together; and they tied a rag over me two eyes, and faith I think they carried me tin miles, no less. Afther that they droppd me sudden, and whin they took the bandage off me two eyes, sure I thought I was in hiven, or hell, or a worse place, it was that splendid wid everything shining around me, and blue flames a-lickin' the dome av the place forninst me two eyes, and the wather a-drippin' around me to bate the band."

"This is a fairy story you are telling me, Mike."

"Sure it's the truth, no less; and it was a rocky flure, and a rocky roof wid the wather a-lakin' through the thatch av it; and all thim divils in black a-dancin' around me, and bowin' and scrapin' before a lidyus-lookin' idol of a thing which looked like the avil wan himself. I was that scared that I fainted away thin and there, and sure whin I opened me two eyes again, I was in me own bed in the loft ave the toolhouse wid divil a sign av the painted demons around me, and narry a spot av 'em left save the paint on me face."

"Paint on your face?"

"Sure! It was paint or clay, or something like it; all red and blue; an' I had the divil's own trouble gittin' it off again, so I did; and the muddy wather that was left afther I washed me face would have made a pig ingpy to look at, so it would."

The story told to him by the gardener meant a great deal, or it meant nothing at all, and the detective was inclined to the former view of the case.

"Mike," he said, presently, "who is your mistress?"

"Mrs. Lynwood; and a foine lady she is, too."

"Maybe she would take me on here, and let me stay and help you with the garden. Sure, if she'll do that, I'll help you fight them divils. Would you like to have me stay?"

"Sure, I would that, Tim."

"Shall I go and ask her?"

"Why not? She can't no more than say no; and faith if I'm left here alone wid the demons much longer I'll go mad entirely, so I will."

"Wait here, then," said Nick, "and I'll have a try at it."

He left the gardener still smoking his pipe and hurried toward the house, skirting it as he approached in the hope that he would encounter the mistress and so avoid the necessity of applying to her through the servants.

He was not disappointed.

Mrs. Lynwood was seated alone on the front veranda, and he approached quite close to her before he announced himself.

"I am Nick Carter," he said to her, then. "I have been on the grounds for an hour or more making what little investigation I could, and now, if you please, I would like to talk the matter over with you."

Mrs. Lynwood leaped to her feet at the first mention of Nick Carter's name; and she let her eyes rest piercingly upon him while he completed the sentence.

"If you are Nick Carter, how did you know that I wanted you?" she asked, still in doubt if he were really who he said he was.

"Because you told me over the telephone," he replied. "I chose to come this way because I believed I could serve you better if it were not known about the place that I am here."

"And does nobody know it?"

"Not a soul."

"How, then, did you get here without being questioned?"

"I went straight to your gardener, Mike. I am already accepted by him as a possible assistant, if only you approve—which I trust you will do. And now, if you please, don't you think it would be well if we step inside while we do the talking?"

"Yes; come in."

She led the way through the wide door into the hall and thence into the library; the very room from which Agnes had disappeared when she passed through the window into oblivion.

"Now tell me about it," said Nick. "I already know when it was and how it was, for Edward Moran has been to see me. Indeed he was with me when you telephoned."

"And did he tell you what I charged him with?"

"Yes; he said you accused him of running off with your daughter."

"At first, Mr. Carter, I really supposed that he had done so. Later, I decided that I had made a mistake; and yesterday I was of the opinion that Agnes had disappeared merely because of her love of a lark, but to-day—now—I know that she was abducted."

"You know it? How?"

"I have received a message from her abductors. Do I appear strangely self-contained and passive under this terrible ordeal, Mr. Carter? Do I speak calmly, as if there were no real trouble at hand? Well, I have forced myself to do so. I have sat there, where you found me, waiting, waiting, waiting, ever since I sent that telephone message to you, knowing that nothing could be done until you arrived, and yet almost crazed by the necessity for waiting."

Mrs. Lynwood's face was pale and drawn, and as she spoke, she held to the back of a chair for support. Nick Carter replied, calmly:

"You have been strong thus far, Mrs. Lynwood; do not give way now. You spoke of a message. Where is it?"

"Here."

She drew a folded slip of paper from her bosom and without a word gave it into Nick's hand.

He opened it and read:

"Illustrious lady, mother of all the virtues! Most beautiful of women, we prostrate ourselves at your feet; we kiss the edge of your gown; we acknowledge ourselves slaves in your presence! Illustrious lady, your daughter has been given to us by the king of heaven, who first endowed her as a goddess and decreed that she should reign over us. Mother of all the virtues, your daughter has at last come into her inheritance. Her beauty blinds us as the blazing sun blinds the eyes. Her purity strengthens us as the sun gives strength to growing plants. Her wisdom will teach us, as the sun lights the way for the traveler. If you mourn for her, remember that in taking her from you we have only obeyed the mandate of the king of heaven, and that in keeping her with us, we do so only that she may at the last guide us, one and all, into the bright realm of the palaces of heaven."

"What nonsense is this?" asked the detective, raising his eyes to hers.

"I found it there," replied Mrs. Lynwood, pointing toward the table in the center of the room.

"When?" asked Nick.

"An hour ago. I entered the room from that door yonder, and as I did so, I fancied that a form stepped through the window. I felt that it was there rather than saw or heard it; and as I was passing the table to look through the window to see if anyone were there I found that letter, and upon it, as if for a weight to hold it in place—this."

She stretched out her hand as she ceased speaking, and Nick saw that her open palm contained five shining coins—five bright pieces of gold, worth twenty dollars each.

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE THROUGH THE WATER.

"Gold?" said Nick.

"Yes, five twenty-dollar gold pieces. What does the letter mean, and why should the gold have been left here with it, Mr. Carter?" she asked.

The detective shook his head.

"I cannot answer those questions at once," he replied; "and I must confess that it is the first time I have ever known anything to turn the tide about and to

pay for the pleasures of abduction rather than to demand ransom for them. What is your own idea of the matter, madam?"

As the detective asked the question he noticed for the first time how distraught Mrs. Lynwood really was. She had held herself in so well until now that she had deceived even Nick Carter regarding the real state of her feelings; but now she swayed in her chair and would have fallen out of it to the floor had he not leaped forward and caught her.

"It is almost more than I can bear," she said, faintly, "but I will try to keep calm. It was the question you asked which made me faint."

"I asked what your own idea of the matter is," repeated Nick.

"And I have not dared to admit, even to myself, that I had an idea about it. It is too terrible—too awful."

"But what is it?"

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Carter, that not far from here there is a settlement of Chinamen? They are gardeners, I believe, but there are many of them."

"Yes; I have heard of several such places on Long Island. There is one near here, you say? I know there is one in Astoria. But what of that? What has that to do with the disappearance of your daughter?"

"Oh, I don't know, sir; I don't know," she moaned, in reply. "I only know that the Chinamen swarm around here at times. I meet them on the road when I am driving. I see them through the palings of the fence when I am walking in my own grounds. I see them everywhere. They seem to come from no place and to be bound for no place, but always they hang around this neighborhood, coming and going in their stealthy fashion, until they have almost made me distracted. And whenever Agnes happens to be with me, they leer at her solemnly, and clasp their hands together as if they were praying."

"This is all very interesting, Mrs. Lynwood. Go on."

"Why need I go on? It is all perfectly plain what I mean. I believe that those Chinamen have abducted Agnes; and, oh, my God! if that be true, what a fate is hers!"

Suddenly the detective bounded to his feet.

He opened the letter which Mrs. Lynwood had received, and read it through a second time, and now with great care. Then he read it again, but this time aloud.

As he finished reading it, he raised his eyes from the paper to ask a question of her, and he was startled by the expression of terror on her face.

Instantly he saw that she had not heard a word he had said, and that her eyes were fixed upon something behind him, while the amazed horror that was pictured in her face made him turn on the instant to discover what it was that she beheld.

As he turned toward the window, he started forward at the same instant, and he was conscious that a dim shadow darted out of his sight, just quick enough to elude his vision, but not quick enough to deceive him concerning its actual presence.

With a bound he leaped through the window after the shadow, alighting upon the ground under the lilac bush where Agnes herself had gone when she disappeared.

The grounds around the house were thickly studded with shrubbery, and yet through it Nick saw, as he struck the ground, a shadow flitting in the direction of the boathouse.

Instantly he was after it.

With a bound he cleared the foliage of the lilac, and then far down the path toward the boathouse, leaping in and out as he ran, and seeming to use every effort to keep as much out of sight as possible, he discovered a shadowy figure, bounding like a deer toward the water.

But the figure had a splendid start of the detective; and it was so agile in keeping a screen of shrubbery between it and the detective, that Nick could only get now and then a glimpse of it as he ran.

Just before the boathouse was reached there was a stretch of gravel walk, several feet in extent, and beyond that there were no bushes, so that when the fugitive darted into that part of the grove, he discov-

ered, just entering upon the edge of the wharf, the figure of the man he was pursuing.

For the length of time required to cross the width of the wharf the fleeing man was in plain view of the detective, and he might easily have used one of his never-failing pistols, and so brought the fellow to a halt; but the thought that occurred to him was that he had the fugitive cornered, and so he withheld his fire, not wishing to inflict unnecessary pain.

Beyond the wharf there was nothing but the wide stretch of open water, flanked on either side by the high bluffs which formed Lynwood Bay, and Nick saw no possible chance for the man to escape.

The wharf itself was not over twenty feet in width, and the man was running lightly and swiftly—so lightly and swiftly, in fact, that it was merely a glance of him that was afforded the detective.

In that glance he saw only a dark figure, such as the man Mike had described to him, with the exception that there were no blue flames circling about his head.

What he did see was the lithe form of a man of less than average size, clad in a single black garment, which fitted tightly into every curve of his body. And then, even as he noted that the garment seemed to begin in a hood which covered the back part of the head, and to extend into stockings so that it encompassed the entire figure—even as he noted this fact the fleeing figure crossed the width of the wharf, and without an instant's pause, plunged into the water.

Nick Carter was not five seconds behind in reaching the edge of the wharf, and there he paused, waiting for it to reappear on the surface of the water. He stood with his revolver in his hand, scanning every inch of the surface of the bay, resolved that if the fugitive refused to halt at his command, to put a bullet through his arm, or leg, and thus to bring him to his senses.

But seconds grew into minutes and the minutes lengthened themselves into an extended interval of time, and still the fugitive did not reappear.

Satisfied at last that the man had found some means of escape other than coming to the surface of the bay in view of the detective, Nick replaced the revolver in his pocket and began to study the situation.

"It is a cinch that the fellow could not find a place to hide under the wharf," he told himself, "for the planking is laid so that it is an easy matter to see from here almost every inch of the surface of the water underneath. A child could not hide from me there, let alone a grown man."

The shape of the bay was not unlike the blade of a pointed spade, with the little wharf where the detective was standing, situated at the apex of it. On either side high bluffs, which presented rocky walls to the sea, rose precipitously thirty or forty feet into the air and all the rest of the view was open water.

"There is a cavern somewhere in one of those bluffs," mused the detective. "That goes without saying. Take all that Mike has said to me about the demons living in the water, and couple that with the disappearance of this fellow, and the existence of such a place is almost proved.

"There is a cavern there, on one side or the other, and there is an entrance to it under the water which that chap was able to reach and pass through without having to reappear on the surface. That, too, would account for Mike's description of the place to which he was taken, when he said the place was dripping with water and that there were rocks all about him."

Satisfied that the man he had pursued would not reappear, Nick turned away from the wharf and returned slowly to the house.

He paused in the pathway for an instant, considering whether he should enter by the door, or return by the way he had come out—that is, through the window, and at last having decided upon the latter course, he passed around the corner of the house, under the lilac bush, and so stepped through the window into the room he had so precipitately left, in his chase after the intruder.

Mrs. Lynwood was no longer there. A glance told him that much.

His first thought was that she had fled from the place in terror at seen as she recovered from her fright consequent upon seeing the face at the window,

and he stepped to the door which communicated with the hallway, intending to pass out.

And here a new surprise awaited him.

The door was locked, and on the inside, for the key was in place.

There was no other exit from that room save by the window through which he had passed, going and returning, and a moment's thought convinced him that the door had not been locked by either one of them when they entered the room together, for he remembered that he had stepped back for her to precede him, and that he had himself closed the door.

"That fellow at the window was not alone," was his instant thought. "There were others with him, and while I pursued one of them the others entered."

With a bound he reached the window again and passed outside, and in an instant he was on his knees on the grass, glass in hand, examining the space under the window.

He readily discovered the imprints of his own feet where he had leaped from the window, and a little care revealed to his practiced eyes impressions which had been left there by several pairs of stockinged feet; but the pressure had been so slight, and the feet so smoothly clad, that it was impossible for him to determine more than that much.

To trace such footprints, either coming or going from the place, was an impossible task, and he did not attempt it. Had the hour been in the early morning, when the grass was still soft with the mists of the night, he might have had some success in that line, but as it was, the stockinged feet of the intruders had left no trace, save in that small space under the bush where the blades of grass had still retained their pliancy, due to moisture and shade.

Nevertheless, he spent almost an hour in a fruitless search.

He was positive that Mrs. Lynwood could not have left the room through the door. He was equally positive that she had not gone out of her own accord, and remembered, through the window, for in that case the marks left by her shoe feet on the grass under the window would have been plainly discernible.

"There has been a second abduction," he muttered, "and that, almost before my eyes, and in the middle of the afternoon. Mike O'Toole's demons seem to be getting busy."

CHAPTER VI.

A VIRGIN SACRIFICE TO THE HEATHEN GOD.

When the detective had exhausted every resource at his command in his search for clews around the house and grounds, he returned to the library where he had talked with Mrs. Lynwood.

The strange letter she had received, accompanied by the five gold pieces, was open on the table before him, and he read and reread it over and over again, striving, almost in vain, to gather some idea of its meaning.

Mike's story about the Demons of the Night was uppermost in his thoughts, for he was convinced that there was more truth than romance in what the gardener had told him.

"It is quite evident to my mind," he mused, "that a gang of men, of some sort, infests this neighborhood. While these experiences through which Mike has passed must be accepted with a large grain of salt, there is evidently a good amount of truth connected with his tale.

"Now, if I couple what he has told me with what Mrs. Lynwood had to say about the Chinamen, it would suggest that the Celestials have some sort of a rendezvous near here. I know that they delight to have secret places of meeting, and all the world knows that there is no class of people in existence who indulge in secret organization so much as they do.

"That letter, received by Mrs. Lynwood, is plainly written, or at least dictated by an Oriental. Nobody but a Chinaman or a Jap would begin a letter in that fashion. 'Illustrious lady; mother of all the virtues! We prostrate ourselves at your feet!' Who but an Oriental would begin a communication in that manner? 'Your daughter has been given to us by the king of heaven, who first endowed her as a goddess and decreed that she should reign over us.'"

He paused in his reading and sat wrapped in thought for a moment, and then of a sudden he leaped to his feet.

"I have it! I have it!" he muttered to himself. "I was right about there being a cavern in one of those cliffs, too; and the whole thing explains the presence of so many Chinamen in the neighborhood, who apparently have no business here.

"It is as plain as the nose on my face. The Celestials have a Joss house somewhere near here—a Joss house where they go to worship, and to indulge in the rites of their society without interference. Mike said that there was an idol in the place to which they took him. An idol—a Joss god—and they have got it hidden away in their cavern where the foregn devils cannot find it or interfere with their worship.

"An idol! A heathen god! A hollow idol wherein they imprison a beautiful virgin, and before which they prostrate themselves in worship while their prisoner slowly dies of starvation. That is why they have addressed Mrs. Lynwood as the mother of all the virtues. That is why, in their letter, they refer to the purity of their new-found goddess. Ay, and that is why, following out the Oriental idea of purchasing a young maiden for their awful sacrifice, they placed the gold upon the table with the letter.

"I have heard of this practice in the Province of Chi-Li, in China. There they select their intended victim, and then they apply to the father of the child and haggle over the price to be paid for it, for their sacrifice. Here they could not do that. Here they selected their victim, and then they stole her away; and they believe that in paying the five gold pieces they have acquitted themselves fairly and in a business way.

"Great Heaven! It is three days since Agnes was stolen away, and it is possible that she has been imprisoned inside that hollow god, all this time, without food. There is no time to lose.

"There must be a great feast on hand to induce the Celestials to take such a risk; or else they feel so secure in their hiding place that they do not fear discovery.

"But why have they taken the mother? Are there two idols there? Or do they require two sacrifices? Hardly that, for only young girls are admissible to the sacrifice.

"Never mind that now! I have the key to the whole thing, and there is no time for conjecture. If Agnes Lynwood is saved from a cruel death I must lose no time."

He rose again and unlocked the door into the hall; then he stepped through and went out upon the veranda just in time to meet Edward Moran, who was in the act of ascending the steps.

"You are just in time, Edward," he said to him. "I want you to obey orders now, and to do what I say without stopping to ask questions."

"I am ready, sir. Tell me what to do and I will do it," was the reply.

"Very well. Find Mike and bring him directly to the library, at once."

Edward darted away; but in five minutes he was back again with the gardener, and Nick received them both in the library. He had already taken a collection of things from his pockets, for he had gone to Lynwood Hall well prepared for changing his disguise many times before he returned to the city, and he was therefore perfectly equipped for what he had decided to do.

"Sit there, Mike," he ordered; "and you there, Edward."

Then he worked with great rapidity upon the young man, using paints and pigments on his face and hands, adjusting a wig and whiskers, which he trimmed to suit him, until at last he stepped back and viewed his handiwork with evident satisfaction.

"You will do, Edward," he said; and then he smiled, for the gardener was gazing at the young man in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Sure, sir," he said, "I would think it was me twin brother, so I would. Faith, is it myself that is here, or is it me that is there? Bedad, if you have him at that way I won't have to say me bades thrapis, and I'll ask the praste to make him do pinnance for me."

There was good reason for Mike's astonishment.

for Nick had transformed Edward into his exact counterpart. The young man had been made to look like an old one—in a word, he had been changed under the deft hands of the detective so that anybody who knew Mike O'Toole would have mistaken Edward for him.

The detective stepped to the window and closed the inside blinds, thus shutting out the light. Then he turned on the lights in the room, and having locked the window and pulled the curtain so that there would be no possibility of any prying, he said:

"Now, Mike, you will change clothes with Edward. I want him to help me with the demons to-night, and you are too much in awe of them; you are too badly frightened to be trusted. You are to change clothes with Edward, and you are to remain in this room, smoking your pipe or sleeping, as you see fit, until I come here again for you; and if you dare to poke your nose out of it without my permission, I'll let the devils eat you. Do you understand?"

"Sure, I have me two ears. But you are no Tim O'Toole; I know that same."

"Never mind that now," replied Nick. "Do as I say."

The change was quickly made, and after locking the gardener in the room, Nick and Edward left the house together and walked through the gathering darkness toward the toolhouse where Mike had his bed, and where the demons of the night were in the habit of visiting him.

"Here is a pipe, Edward," he said. "I want you to take it and to go to the boathouse. There is a bench there where you will seat yourself and smoke; and you are to remain there all night, if necessary. I don't know whether anything will happen to you or not. Possibly nothing will occur; but also it is more than probable that some of Mike's Demons of the Night will appear to you. No matter what happens, you must be passive and not try to fight them. Do you think you have courage enough to play the part?"

"I think so, sir."

"And to let them do with you as they please?"

"If those are your orders; yes, sir."

"Those are my orders. I shall not be far away. Understand, Edward, Mike's demons are no dream of his imagination. I think I know who and what they are, but I am not sure; but if they are what I think they are, you and I will meet with experiences which we will never forget before another dawn arrives."

"Won't you tell me who and what you think they are, sir?" asked Edward.

"Yes; in a word or two. Have you ever heard of the Chinese Boxers? Of course you have. It is a secret organization which exists everywhere in the world where there are a lot of Chinamen together. In their secret meetings they indulge in a sort of fetish worship which would put a Zulu high priest to the blush. I think that somewhere inside one of those high bluffs yonder there is a cavern which a lot of Chinamen have transformed into a temple for their heathenish practices, and I think, from their actions, that this night must be an annual feast of some kind, at which they expect to have a great attendance, and for which they have been preparing for a long time—perhaps for a whole year. Once, in the Province of Chi-Li, in China, I gained admittance to a meeting of the sort I am describing, and it was not a pleasant thing to witness. But, Edward, if we are to save Agnes Lynwood from a terrible death and her mother from a fate that is even worse, we must find our way into their place of meeting this night, even though there be a thousand Celestials there to obstruct our entrance. Are you game? And are you brave enough to do as I say without question?"

"I will do as you tell me, no matter what comes," replied the young man, quietly.

"Good, lad! I did not misjudge you, I see."

"I am merely to sit on that bench and wait?"

"Yes; that is all. If I am correct in my conjectures, you will not be disturbed until late—probably near midnight. Then you will be attacked. If that is so, you must act the part of Mike as well as you can, and to do that you have only to appear to be terrorized—to groan and hide your head. Let them do with you as they will, Edward."

"I will, I promise you."

"Remember, I will not be far away. Remember,

this part you play is necessary, for it is the only way in which I can find the entrance to their cavern temple. They must attack you, and take you there, as I verily believe they will do—and I must follow them when they do that."

"I'll do my part."

"It is not fair for me to conceal the fact from you, that you run a great risk, lad. I must tell you all the truth."

"Well?"

"If this meeting is what I think it is—if it is the same sort as the one I attended in China, you will find yourself face to face with an ordeal that is almost too horrible to describe, for you will be taken into their temple and bound with ropes at the feet of their idol."

"Go on, sir, I can bear it. It does not frighten me, if you will be there."

"And you will not be alone in your frightful predicament. I have not told you as yet, but Agnes' mother was also carried off this afternoon, and when you are dragged to the feet of the idol and tied there, with a painted Chinaman standing over you ready to cut your heart out of your body, you will not be alone. Mrs. Lynwood will be there also, bound hand and foot, and awaiting the same fate, for, according to their rites, two human beings must be sacrificed to the starving virgin inside the hollow idol. Do you understand me now, Edward? Agnes Lynwood has been a prisoner, inside that idol, three days without food. She is their goddess of purity, given to the god Siva, and she must die to-night if we do not rescue her."

CHAPTER VII.

TAKING A TRAIL THROUGH WATER.

Edward Moran could only stare at the detective in speechless horror, as he heard and understood for the first time the terrible crisis which hung above the head of his sweetheart.

The intelligence that Agnes' mother was also a prisoner in the hands of the demons came as a surprise to him, but its significance was entirely dwarfed beside the knowledge of the peril in which Agnes stood.

"Understand me," continued Nick. "I do not say these things to frighten you, but to prepare you for the worst that is to come. It may be that I err on the wrong side; it may be that the danger to them and to you is not so great as I picture it; I cannot say. I only know that if my surmises are correct—that if this cavern does exist and if it has been made into a temple for the heathenish rites of the Boxers—that if this night is an anniversary of some great festival of theirs, and that if this sect or clan of Chinamen is patterned after those in their own country, it will all be as I say.

"This idol which they set up in secret places is a counterpart of the god Siva; only that its prerogatives are infinitely worse and more horrible. Once every year a virgin is given to this god, and she is sacrificed to him by being locked inside the terrible figure, and left there until she dies of starvation.

"Sometimes she is procured long before the time for the festival, and during the time of waiting she is given food and drink, until a few days before the sacrifice, when all this is denied to her. In the meantime, the devotees sit around the idol, squatted on their haunches, beating drums and conches, and droning doleful and musicless dirges.

"Then, as the hour for the final ceremony draws near, two captives are brought in, and these are bound upon the pedestal at the feet of the idol.

"The beating of the drum continues, as if to drown out the moans of the starving victim in the hollow of the idol, and then, when the hour of midnight arrives, the victims at the foot of the altar are slain, the door of the idol is thrown open, and if by chance the virgin sacrifice is still alive, she staggers out and falls in horror and faintness before the murderous demons; but only to be slain as she falls.

"Now, Edward, I cannot tell how many of these heathens there may be in that retreat. There may not be more than a dozen; and there may be a hundred. In fact, I suppose there will be a large attendance, for if this is an annual festival, as I have reason to suppose it is, and if this is their one secure place of meet-

ing, where they can practice their orgies without fear of interruption, it is safe to suppose that they will travel here from far and near in order to be present on this great occasion.

"I wish, Edward, that I could summon assistance here to our aid, but that is manifestly impossible, since there is not time, and even if there were, it is not likely that those who came would be able to follow me into this hidden cavern. Chick might be able to do so if he were here, but I know of no other who could.

"You see, therefore, that I must do it alone."

"But if there are so many there, as you fear there may be, how will it be possible for you to accomplish it all alone?" asked Edward.

The detective smiled.

"Everything is possible," he replied. "Nothing is impossible. The necessity of a crisis always finds somebody ready to meet and cope with it. I think, for one thing, if any of these Chinamen will be armed. They will go there feeling perfectly secure and they will deem weapons therefore unnecessary. It may be that there will be a few knives in the place, but I am banking on their sense of perfect security when I say that I do not believe there will be a firearm in the place.

"And if there is not——"

He paused a moment and fixed his eyes on young Moran, then added:

"I shall have thirty bullets at my command. I will guarantee with them to hit, fairly, thirty half-eyes squarely in the center. I think, with those bullets, that I can break enough legs and knee pans to set them all a-howling, and to make them think that their temple is invaded by a regiment of men.

"There is another thing, Edward. The entrance to that cavern is evidently through the water, and these Chinamen will not be able to carry many firearms with them through the wet."

"But how will you do that?"

"I shall take with me six revolvers, each holding five shots, and I will guarantee that not a cartridge will miss fire when I pull the trigger on it," replied the detective. "Don't you understand, my lad, that I will have to follow the men who capture you, to the cavern?"

"Yes; but how?"

"By being under this wharf when they attack you; by letting myself silently into the water after them and by following them under the water. That is the only way."

"Can you do that?" asked Edward.

"Yes," replied Nick, calmly, "I can do it. I will do it. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"You are going to bring yourself face to face with death, Edward. Are you still ready?"

"Yes."

"You will not falter?"

"No."

"No matter what happens?"

"No matter what may happen, sir."

"You are a brave lad, Edward, and we will win out."

"I believe it, Mr. Carter."

"When I make my attack upon the fiends in there, you will be helpless to aid me. You will be tied hand and foot, and unable to move or to raise your hand."

"And you will be fighting alone against that horde of ruffians. Surely I should be able to do my part, which consists only of remaining still while you do the work."

"Ah! But to remain inactive in such a crisis is always the hardest part of the work, Edward; at least, it is so for a brave man, and you are one."

"Thank you."

"I mean it, my boy. Shake hands now. It is almost dark, and the time has come for you to take your place on the bench on the wharf."

"One moment, Mr. Carter."

"Yes."

"Suppose that your conjectures are only half correct."

"Well?"

"Suppose that I should not be attacked at all—that those heathen have found another victim and will not make use of Mike, whom, if I understand you correctly, they have been in a sense preparing for this

night. Suppose, in short, that I should sit the night out on the wharf and that the Boxers should not come near me; in that case you will have no guides to follow, and you will not be able to find the cavern. What, then? Will not Agnes and her mother be murdered before we can get to them?"

"That is the chance we have to take, Edward."

"But will you continue to wait after the time for them to appear has arrived, and still they have not come?"

Nick was silent a moment, and then he replied, slowly:

"I know that the wharf is within swimming distance, under water, of the entrance to their cavern. Within five minutes after you leave me I shall be in the water under the wharf. I shall not waste my time. More than that I cannot say. Go now. We will do the best we can, and hope and pray for success."

He stretched out his hand to Edward, who seized it in silent pressure; and then the young man turned away and descended the path to the wharf.

The eyes of the detective were upon him until he had taken his seat on the bench and lighted the pipe which Nick had given him. Then the little giant sighed deeply, turned away and entered the toolhouse.

Darkness had fallen then, and the stars already studded the heavens over the bay.

Ten minutes later, had you been watching the door of the toolhouse, you would have seen a ghostly figure, all in white, and yet naked save for a heavy breech cloth about its loins, appear for an instant in the open, and then glide swiftly out of sight among the trees, taking the direction toward the water.

And that ghostly figure was Nick Carter. He had divested himself of his clothing, and having bound his loins with a strip of canvas cut from the awnings of the house, he concealed his revolvers in its folds.

Then, having painted his body from neck to heels, with the white paint found in the toolhouse, he glided to the waterside, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE DEPTHS OF THE BAY.

There are many ways in which a person may manifest true courage, and certainly Nick Carter had never in all his experience been called upon to draw upon his reserve forces of resource as he was that night.

It has already been said that he went to Lynwood Hall prepared for emergencies, and ready to adopt several different disguises if in the course of his work he should discover that changes and alterations were necessary; but it is true that he was in no wise prepared for the actual emergency which did arise.

When he decided that he would be obliged to follow the pursuit of the fiends he was tracking, through the water, he realized that in order to be successful in that undertaking, he must perforce go practically naked.

If he could have secured one of the suits of black, reaching from head to heels, which he had reason to believe were worn by the frequenters of the cavern, the rest would have been simple enough, but such a thing was manifestly impossible, and he had to resort to whatever expedient he could devise in order to fill the bill.

A white awning stretched over one of the side windows of the house suggested an idea to him, and a pot of freshly-mixed white paint in the toolhouse completed it.

"They are black; I will be white," he mused. "Paint is not pleasant in contact with one's skin, but there are methods of getting rid of it, and I will use it."

Reader, stop and ask yourself if you would have had the courage to do that? Deliberately to have stripped yourself naked, and then with a brush, to have covered your body, your arms and legs with a thick coat of paint.

That is what Nick Carter did: and having accomplished that much to his satisfaction, he bound the canvas around his loins, and deftly concealed within its folds the six revolvers he was determined he would take into the cavern with him.

But that was not all that he did.

There was a goodly supply of grease paint in the

pockets of the clothes he had worn to Lynwood Hall; not enough, to be sure, to cover the body, else he would not have been forced to make use of the paint he discovered in the toolhouse; but sufficient for the purpose he had in view for it; and so, with that grease paint, commonly used for make-ups, he changed his face to a perfect representation of a Chinaman, save only the fact that this one was as white as the driven snow; as white, in fact, as any ghost could hope to be—as white as paint would make him.

Have you ever noticed the clown at a circus, how deadly white he makes his face, and how he puts blood-red eyebrows and red spots on his cheeks and lips over it all? That is what Nick Carter did, only that he gave his eyes the almond shape of the Celestial, and he added a long queue, also of white, which he manufactured out of strips of the canvas.

The thought occurred to him that perhaps his appearance would frighten the Chinamen; and he knew if he could draw upon their superstitious terrors, he would have little to fear from their retaliation upon him. They would be too frightened to fight.

Neither the greast paint on his face nor the house paint on his body would wash off in the water; he knew that much.

Keeping well under cover of the trees and shrubbery, he glided to the water's edge, and silently immersed himself.

Then, diving, with a few quick and powerful strokes he brought himself to the wharf where, in the shadow under it, he permitted his head to appear above the water.

Then began the period of waiting.

He could hear above him the occasional movement of Mose's feet as the young man shifted them from one spot to spot for the sake of comfort.

And so an hour passed; a chilly, unpleasant hour which would have told upon him even more severely than it did had it not been for the warmth that was imparted by the paint with which he had covered himself.

Suddenly he heard the patter of feet on the boards over him, and he held himself in readiness to act; but the feet never stopped.

They passed across the wharf over him, and then he felt the structure shake as a body leaped into the air from the edge of it.

This was followed by a splash in the water, and he could see a dark form shoot swiftly away, lost to his sight almost in an instant.

But the detective had noted the direction taken by that shadowy form, and he knew that others would soon follow it, so he permitted himself to sink silently into the depths, and then with quick strokes he propelled himself under the surface to a point that was a dozen yards beyond where the diver had gone in.

There again he waited, permitting only his eyes and nose to appear above the water—waited until he could see a second black figure gliding down the path toward the boathouse.

This figure showed against the sky so that he could see it plainly; he could even see the head turn when the figure of the supposed Mike was discovered apparently sleeping on the bench on the wharf; but it did not pause or hesitate.

Patter, patter came the stockinged feet across the wharf as before, and without pausing an instant at the edge of the wharf, the man leaped into the air with his hands over his head, as divers do, and with scarcely a splash clove into the depths at almost the precise spot where the figure which had preceded him had disappeared.

And Nick, when he saw that the man was about to dive, permitted himself to sink to the bottom, so that looking upward, even in that apparently black water, he could plainly discern the dark figure of the diver as it shot through the liquid element.

And so he watched it till it disappeared; and then, certain now of the trail, he propelled himself to the spot where he had lost sight of it—or to a point sufficiently near to that spot, and again he waited.

As before, he kept his eyes and nose above the water, and after another wait of five minutes, a third form appeared on the wharf.

This one, unlike the others, paused for a moment.

and seemed to be studying the figure of the man on the bench.

But he did not approach it, and apparently satisfied with his view of it, he at last crossed the wharf as the others had done before him, and leaped into the air.

As in the other cases, Nick permitted himself to sink into the depths; and as before, he watched the shadowy figure as it shot through the water.

It passed within ten feet of him, and were it not that Nick knew that a diver inevitably closes his eyes until the force of his first leap is expended, he would have feared discovery; as it was, he felt that there was little danger that any of the divers would see him, since it was positive that they knew their goal so well that they could doubtless have approached it with certainty without opening their eyes at all—at least, until within a few feet of it.

This third diver took him many yards nearer to the wished-for goal; it took him so far, in fact, that he could see before him, under the water, the black mass of the cliff where it extended downward into the depths of the bay.

"Now comes the difficult part of my undertaking," he mused. "I am getting chilled, and yet, when the next diver appears, I must sink at once so that I can look upward at him from the bottom; otherwise I will not be able to see him at all in this black water."

Fortunately he had not long to wait.

Scarce three minutes elapsed before the fourth appeared.

Like the third, he halted for an instant upon the pier before he took the plunge; and he also took a step toward the seemingly sleeping man on the bench, as if to rouse him, but thought better of it and took to the water as the others had done.

Nick Carter was already at the bottom, looking upward, when this man struck the water, and he could see him plainly from the instant when the splash occurred.

He was a superb swimmer, too.

He cleft the water like an arrow, and with his hands together over his head, shot like a bullet toward his goal.

He came with a curve like an inverted rainbow, his body bent in the same shape, and such was the force and precision with which he dove, that he did not have to move his hands to make a stroke with them until he was almost at the side of the cliff.

Then, to Nick's surprise, he turned, and with a few sharp strokes, shot downward, almost directly toward the bottom, and until he could almost have touched it.

Then he turned again, and propelled himself straight for the cliff, finally darting under a ledge where he disappeared, within twenty feet of where the detective was clinging, in order to hold himself down.

The detective was forced now to come to the surface for air, and he struck his feet against the bottom and shot upward as one might throw a stone into the air.

Then, as he reached the surface, another diver leaped from the wharf; but Nick, feeling that now he knew enough to find the submarine entrance to the cavern without much trouble, remained where he was, on the surface, determined to let him pass.

He forgot, in that instant, that his own body was snowy white, and therefore plainly to be seen by the diver, should he happen to look upward while he was passing. The want of breath in his own body, and the certainty that now he could find without further aid the entrance to the cavern, deprived him for the moment of his usual caution.

But he was quickly apprised of it, for while he was moving his hands and feet as silently as possible in order to keep himself afloat, he felt the presence of a body near him, and at the same instant he was seized around the legs in a viselike grip, and before he could do aught to prevent it, he was drawn bodily under the water into the depths below.

Fortunately he had just taken a long breath, and so was in a measure prepared for the struggle that was sure to follow.

And follow it did.

The arms which seized him were strong and muscular, and he felt them pulling him downward into the dark waters of the bay, while with each instant, glidding, snowy forms were rushing upward.

The detective kicked with all his strength, but even that force was not sufficient to dislodge the grasp that was upon him, and after an effort or two of that kind, he decided to make an end of it then and there, for he realized that now the divers were coming closer together and that there was, therefore, no time to lose, unless he wished to be assailed by others as well as this one.

With a great effort he turned his body almost squarely around in the water, and so managed to seize his assailant; and then, locked in each other's deadly embrace, they sank like stones to the bottom of the bay.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER'S AWFUL PERIL.

As they sank toward the bottom, each tried to seize the other by the throat, and it was Nick Carter who succeeded in obtaining that hold.

He had the advantage at the start, in that he was above his assailant, and could reach downward.

As he reached for the diver, his left hand came in contact with the black-hood covering of the Chinaman's head, and with a jerk he pulled it away so that the long queue, coiled tightly at the top, was liberated.

Instantly Nick seized upon it, and then with his right hand he reached down still further for the man's throat, and grasping it, he shut his fingers together in their fiercest pressure.

The neck is not made which could withstand the pressure which Nick Carter put upon that Chinaman, and instantly his grasp upon the detective relapsed, grew limp and uncertain, and then fell away altogether.

They touched bottom as this happened, and when the detective kicked against the stones sharply to send them to the top again, he was nearly stunned by the force of a blow he received on the top of his head where it came into contact with a ledge of rock above him.

For an instant he almost released the Chinaman, but then he felt himself rising again, and as he rose, gliding along the edge of rocks.

He looked upward over him, and saw that all was dark. Where the light over the surface of the water should have appeared, all was intense blackness.

For one fleeting instant he was dismayed by the thought that perhaps they were rising in a *cul de sac* in the rocks, and that he would be drowned there before he could extricate himself, but even as the thought took shape, his head rose above the water, and he knew that at last he was inside the cavern he had been seeking.

During all this time he had not released his hold upon the Chinaman, who now hung limp and apparently lifeless in his hands; and perceiving that the man had lost consciousness and was therefore harmless, Nick released his hold upon him and let him slip away into the depths of the water.

"I cannot afford to endanger the lives of two women by trying to save your worthless skin," he muttered, as he released his hold. "You would have drowned me, and you would have murdered those whom I seek to rescue, so down you go. And now, where am I?"

It was absolutely black where he was, but nevertheless he was about to strike out in some direction in the hope of finding a landing place, when close at hand he heard a quick puffing such as a man will make when he has come to the surface after a long immersion, and he knew that another diver had arrived inside the cavern.

"If that fellow touches me, I can see his finish," was the thought which occurred to him as he waited and listened, keeping perfectly still in the meanwhile, save for the slightest motion of his hands and feet under the water, sufficiently only to keep him afloat.

But the diver did not brush against him, although he came so near that he might have done so.

In the silence of that vaulted cavern, Nick could plainly hear the man's breathing, and he could follow with his sense the direction taken by the swimmer, who struck out at right angles from the direction in which Nick was facing, and presently, swerving in the

intelligence which came to the listening ears of the detective, struck the shore and pulled himself upon it.

Nick could hear him as he scrambled up the bank. He could hear the brushing of his body against the rocks as he made his way through the darkness to some place beyond; and then the sounds ceased and the detective knew that the man had turned an angle in the covern, and was as lost to further sound as he was to sight.

But the direction had been given to Nick, and it was enough.

Three or four quick strokes took him to the side of the cavern, where a shelf of rock afforded him a hold, and in a moment more he had drawn himself out of the water.

Still utter darkness; impenetrable blackness; and then, from the depths of the water he had just left, more puffing and breathing announced still another arrival.

"They are coming as thick as flies now," thought Nick, with a grim smile, as he drew himself to one side, close against the wall, and waited, prepared to act quickly and silently, but effectively, if by any chance the newcomer should brush against him.

But he did not.

He passed by so closely that the detective almost felt the touch of his body against his own—but he passed; and went on his way unsuspicious of the presence of an enemy in the cavern.

This time the detective could hear even better than before, and he knew perfectly well when the man turned a corner in the corridor of the cavern. More than that, he could now detect a faint glow of light where it sifted through the intensity of the darkness.

"It is getting late and they will be coming swiftly now," he mused, as he started forward.

A half dozen steps brought him to the turn which he knew must be there, and passing it, he saw, at the end of an extensive gallery through the rocks, a spot where it seemed to open into a roomlike place; and there a light, or many lights, were burning.

From there also came the murmur of voices, and he knew that at last he was within reach of those whom he had come to save.

But now he was confronted by another danger which had not occurred to him before. He realized that in the faintest glow of light, his painted body would shine like a glow worm, and would be plainly visible to any one of the divers who might approach.

"In the black darkness beyond the turn, they cannot see me," he mused. "In darkness as perfect as that white does not exist, but here, where there is the faintest glow of light, I shine like a meteor. I must not go ahead now, while others are arriving. There is only one thing to do, and that is to return to the outer cavern and wait there until the Chinamen have ceased to come."

He turned to retrace his steps. In another instant he would have been out of immediate danger of discovery; but he had lingered one instant too long, for as he turned, he heard a frightened cry which was uttered almost in his face, and then the patter of feet running in the opposite direction.

On the instant he bounded after it, and in the second leap he overtook the man who had discovered him.

It was the detective's idea to seize the fellow and by covering his mouth to prevent him from giving further alarm to the others in the cavern; and having done that, to leap with him into the water and so to destroy all traces of the cause for alarm.

But, although he succeeded in reaching the man—although he succeeded in silencing him, it was not until the fellow had called out a frightened warning to the others in the cavern—a warning which fortunately Nick Carter understood, and which, as will be seen, gave him an idea for his further operations.

The warning which the terrorized Mongolian shrieked at his companions, translated into English, was:

"Help me! help me! The spirit of Siva resents the white woman!"

It was all that the man had an opportunity to say, for Nick Carter's fist silenced all further utterance on his part. It fell with crushing force against the Chin-

man's jaw, and it delivered a knockout blow, for the fellow sank lifeless and still into the arms of the detective.

Nick knew that he was already near the pool from whence he had emerged when he entered the cavern. Indeed, another three or four paces brought him to it, and he raised the body of the man he carried and hurled it into the water from whence a resounding splash and a gurgle announced that it had sunk like a stone to the bottom.

As he flung the body from him, he could hear the patter of many stockinged feet rushing toward him, and for the briefest fraction of an instant he hesitated whether to dive into the depths himself and thus seek to escape the attack for the moment, or to turn and face them all at once.

It was that brief instant of hesitation which decided the thing for him. In it he concluded that even though the Chinamen were alarmed, it would be better to wait before the attack, and so he raised his hands above his head and leaped forward.

And then an accident occurred which could not have been foreseen or avoided.

At the very instant he leaped toward the water to dive out of sight into the depths, another diver from the outside came to the surface; and as luck would have it, he rose at the precise spot where the detective struck the water.

Neither could see the other.

The man in the water had, of course, heard nothing of the tumult in the cavern and was accordingly unprepared for the shock he received when the detective struck against him.

It would be difficult indeed to tell which was the most astonished by the impact, the detective or the Chinaman; but the latter succeeded in letting out a yell before he was carried downward again by the weight of Nick's body, and that yell told the pursuers where to search for their prey.

Moreover, the man against whom the detective struck in his descent, seized him around the body, and he succeeded in gaining such a hold that for the moment Nick was rendered helpless.

They sank under the water together, and, naturally, each strove to rise to the surface again with as little delay as possible; and as they went down together, Nick succeeded in tearing himself loose from the fellow's grasp.

But in the meantime a half score of dark forms had dashed into the passageway after the escaping detective, and behind them were others bearing lights, so that the white figure of the detective was plainly visible to them as they rushed forward; and scarcely had he made the plunge into the black water when the ten pursuers leaped after him.

When Nick kicked himself loose from the grasp of the man in the water and rose to the surface, therefore, it was only to discover that he was surrounded by what seemed to be a horde of swimmers, while from the direction of the ledge from which he had leaped there came a constant splashing made by others who were coming to the assistance of their friends.

A dozen pairs of hands seized the detective as he rose to the surface. They were around his neck, around his legs, on his back, above him, below him, beside him—everywhere at once, it seemed, and half exhausted as he was by the chill of his long immersion in the water, they succeeded in overpowering him.

On land, the detective might successfully have opposed them all, but in the water he could not adequately defend himself, and so, after a short but fierce battle, the detective was captured, and a moment later he was dragged to the shore, where he was held face down on the rocks by many of his assailants, while the others brought cords with which to bind him.

And so, presently, a captive, he was carried into the inner cavern and thrown in a helpless heap at the feet of the hideous and fellow idol.

CHAPTER X.

BEHIND THE IDOL'S EYES.

Although Nick had been attacked and overpowered by the horde of Chinamen, he had not been in the least injured. Indeed it seemed as if they had used every effort to avoid inflicting an injury upon him, notwithstanding the fact that they had fought none the less determinedly to capture him.

Then, when he was laid at the feet of the idol, with hands and feet bound so tightly that even with his great strength he knew that he was utterly helpless, they crowded around him, chattering like so many apes, and evidently greatly disturbed and frightened by what they had done.

They looked upon his white body in evident awe. They raised the canvas-made queue in their hands, examined it solemnly, and shook their heads in amazement. They gazed in consternation at their own hands where the white paint from the detective's body had rubbed off upon them, and they touched his cold body with the tips of their fingers as if they were in contact with a thing of dread.

Altogether their conduct amazed the detective. He could, for the moment, make nothing of it.

He realized, however, that they were afraid of him, even though he was a prisoner and utterly helpless in their hands, and so he remained still and silent, waiting, while he kept his eyes busy taking in every detail of his surroundings.

He counted the number of Chinamen present, and saw that there were twenty-one of them.

He also recognized the cavern as the place which Mike had so graphically described to him—the dome-shaped place where the water dripped from the roof and where there were rocks on every side.

He looked upward at the hideous idol which the Chinamen worshiped, and as he looked he was conscious of two things. First, that he was not alone in the peril he endured, for although he could not raise his head to see around him, he could nevertheless determine the outlines of a second bound figure—the figure of a human—bound and helpless as he was, and also stretched upon the rocky floor of the cavern not ten feet away.

And second, he could hear faint moans which seemed to proceed from the interior of the hideous thing which these creatures worshiped as a god; and he knew without being told that the prisoner on the floor so near to him was Mrs. Lynwood, and that the moans he heard, proceeding from the hollow interior of the idol, were made by Agnes, who was a prisoner there.

Again his eyes turned toward his captors, and again he noticed that they seemed to be in more fear of him than inimical toward him.

He wondered also, because they seemed to fear to touch him, and that when they did so, it was only with the tips of their fingers.

Then, while he was studying them, he heard a commotion as if made by others approaching the place; and it proceeded from the direction opposite that by which he had come—that is, from the land, instead of from the water side of the cavern; and then, in a moment more three additional Chinamen appeared, leading unresistingly, although unbound, the figure of Edward Moran, still clad in the disguise which Nick had given him.

"There is another entrance to this place than by the water," was the instant thought of the detective. "I might have known that much; and yet, it might have been infinitely more difficult for me to find than the water entrance."

Our readers know that Nick Carter is a perfect master of the Chinese language; and so now, obeying a sudden impulse which was suggested to him by the evident awe in which his captors held him, he called out, commandingly, in that tongue:

"Release the girl from the embrace of Siva! Release her, I say, and place her here! Dogs and carrion that you are, would you all wander for eternity in darkness, and would you have the ghosts of your ancestors never see the light of heaven? Release her! Let her sit at the feet of Siva!"

Instantly a dozen forms leaped toward the idol. A door in the back of it was thrown open and then, re-

tering as she walked, pale, emaciated, with drawn face and lusterless eyes, Agnes Lynwood was brought forward into the light shed by the hundreds of candles with which the cavern was illuminated.

Her hands were bound together behind her back; her feet were also bound, but there was a length of cord between them so that she could take short and mincing steps; but she was so weak from lack of nourishment that she could not have stood upright had not her captors supported her on either side as they approached the spot where the detective was stretched upon the rocks.

Agnes was crooning some fragment of a song to herself, and the detective saw that forgetfulness had mercifully intervened and had relieved her of all sense of the terror of her surroundings and the sufferings she had endured.

As they brought her forward, her eyes lighted for an instant upon Moran, dressed in the garb of Mike O'Toole, and for an instant a faint glimmering of recollection seemed to stir her, but it faded away almost instantly.

She was led forward unresistingly and forced to sit between the feet of the idol, and then while two of the Chinamen remained near her as a sort of guard, the others turned again to Nick as if for further orders.

"I wonder if they would unbind me. If I should order them to do so," he thought; but he did not dare to attempt the experiment.

Neither did he dare to speak in English, in order to reassure Mrs. Lynwood, who he felt assured was conscious, although she had made no sound nor sign since she was brought into the cavern. Nevertheless she had moved several times, so that he was convinced that she was aware of all that was taking place.

He wished that he could tell her to have courage and that he would yet save her and her daughter from the awful peril in which they stood, but he realized that to utter a word in English would be to endanger the success of his own plans, which had now taken a definite form. He was endeavoring to believe that he could not hope that the had recognized him. He felt that she must have regarded him as a part of the terrible ceremony she was called upon to endure.

Moran was still standing between the men who had brought him into the place and Nick could see his face; but it was impassive and told the detective nothing at all. The young man was living up to the instructions the detective had given him even better than Nick had dared to hope.

As the Chinamen returned to him, and grouped themselves around him as if waiting for further orders, the detective thought rapidly.

"The fiends have not touched the canvas that is around my waist," was his mental comment, "and, therefore my weapons are safe. If I can get them to put me inside the idol, in the place from which they have taken Agnes, at my command, it will take me but a moment to free myself from these bonds; and then —well, then, I think I can fight a way out of this dilemma."

As soon as Agnes was seated between the feet of the idol, he raised his voice again, and rendering it as deep and guttural as he could, he cried:

"It is well! And now, Siva would have his own! Siva would claim his own!"

They drew still closer toward him, but none ventured to touch him.

"Siva claims his own!" he shouted to them again. "Return me to the embrace of Siva!"

Then, slowly, as if he was not sure of what he did, one of the Chinamen stepped forward, and with a knife, cut the cords which bound the detective's feet together, and the instant they were free, Nick performed a little athletic trick of leaping to his feet from the spring of his shoulders, so that he stood before them, with his hands still bound, to be sure, but appearing to them like a frightful and a colossal thing.

As he leaped to his feet, they fell back, away from him, in evident terror; and he, still intent upon gaining his entire freedom, and convinced that they would not release his hands, turned solemnly toward the idol, passed around to the back of it, and thence entered through the still open door from which they had taken the tottering form of Agnes Lynwood.

Instantly, the Chinamen leaped forward. He had no sooner passed inside the idol than the door of it was banged shut behind him, and he heard a catch fall into place as it fastened itself against his escape; but he only smiled to himself, for he had never yet discovered a door which could hold him if he could get a purchase for his shoulders in order to burst it open.

A mere glance at this one had convinced him that he could break it down with little effort, and so he was content to wait until the proper moment to act arrived.

The instant the catch of the door snapped into place, the detective set to work.

He strained at the bonds upon his wrists until he loosened them, for the water had made them elastic, and now, freed from the prying gaze of his captors, it was a comparatively easy matter for him to free himself.

In a space of time in which ten might have been counted, his hands were free, and it only required a second after that for him to seize two of his revolvers in his hands, and to arrange the others so that he could readily seize them when those in his grasp were empty.

"Now," he muttered, "I can face this horde with little fear."

He peered for one instant through the eyes of the idol at the scene before him; and such a scene it has seldom if ever been the fortune of a human being to witness in a civilized community.

The Chinamen had joined hands, and then stood in a semicircle around the front of the idol. Three of them had detached themselves from the group and had stepped forward.

As Nick looked out upon them through his strange windows, he saw that the three were standing over the three captives; that they held long and gleaming knives aloft in their hands, and that they were evidently merely awaiting some sort of a signal from the other—or from the interior of the idol, he could not determine which—to plunge the blades into the bodies of their victims.

The face of the idol was as big as a washtub. The eyes were round holes as large as silver dollars. The mouth was an oblong aperture a foot long and three or four inches in width.

As the detective looked through the eyes upon that scene, it seemed to him as if the knives were in the very act of descending, and he did not wait to see more.

The idol's mouth afforded an excellent loophole through which to fire, and he made instant use of it.

Three sharp reports rang out through that cavern and reverberated like the explosion of so many cannons.

The three Chinamen who had stood over their victims, with the uplifted knives in their hands, sank in their tracks to the rocky floor of the cave, and a chorus of hideous yells of terror and rage came from their dancing and unsuspecting companions.

Nor did the reports of the pistols cease with those three.

They continued with the rapidity of a rapid-fire gun,—crack! crack! crack! crack! one after another, so rapidly that it was impossible to count them, had one cared to try to do so; and with each report there came an added shriek, and added howl, another groan, and the falling of another body to the floor of the cavern.

The ten shots of the two revolvers were discharged faster than a person could count, and the now worthless weapons were dropped to the ground inside the idol, and other weapons took their places in the grasp of the detective; and so, ten more shots rang out, until the place was transformed into a pandemonium, and it became so filled with smoke that the flames on the candles were almost hidden from sight.

And then, when the second ten bullets had sped on their several ways, the detective dropped those two weapons to the floor and seized the third pair; but he did not continue to fire through his improvised loophole.

Outside, in the cavern, the smoke was so dense that he could not longer see to shoot, and so he turned, and with a fierce kick, sent the door at the back of the idol flying from its hinges.

With a quick bound the detective reached the floor of the cavern. With another, he passed to the front of the idol, and then with a rapidity which astonished

even himself, he seized first one and then another of the captives until he had taken all three of them, and dragged them backward behind the image.

They were bound hand and foot, and were therefore helpless, for even Moran had been tied for the sacrifice, when Nick passed through the door into the interior of the idol.

Nick's only idea in pulling them back behind the image, was to get them out of immediate danger while he had room to continue the fight, and that he succeeded in accomplishing; but when it was done, and he leaped again to the front of the idol, there was nobody left for him to attack, and he knew in that instant, that the Chinamen had fled in their terror to the water, and, perhaps, also, to the other entrance, to escape from the frightful havoc wrought by his pistols.

Around him there were groanings and moanings from the wounded men, for, save in the case of the three men who had held the knives over the intended victims, Nick Carter had not shot to kill, but only to wound; but there were broken knees and broken shoulders; broken legs and arms, and scarred heads and bodies; and as the smoke cleared and the detective looked around him, he was amazed at the effect of his continued fire.

Many of the wounded—all those who could walk or run, in fact—had fled with those who were unhurt; but, nevertheless, there were three dead Chinamen and twelve who were unable to escape, writhing in agony upon the rocks.

"Twelve and three are fifteen," mused the detective, grimly. "Fifteen and nine are twenty-four. Nine have escaped—or, rather, nine have fled, some of them, I have no doubt, to drown in the water of the bay before they can reach a place of safety; and as for the others, I think I can trace them."

His first act then was to cut the thongs which held Moran, and his next to direct him to take Agnes in his arms while he himself bore the mother.

"Lead the way, Edward," he commanded. "They brought you in here for the sacrifice, and you were not blindfolded. You should know the way out again."

"And I do," replied Moran.

They left the shrieking and wounded Chinamen behind them, and dashed through the cavern to the entrance, following a winding way which led them eventually into a canyon-like ravine which ran through the bluff just outside the boundaries of Lynwood.

And so they reached the open air, where the stars were shining, and where the night air was cool and sweet.

And so they ran on and on to Lynwood Hall, where they deposited their burdens, now more dead than alive, in safety inside the house.

* * * * * * *

Reader, that ends the story of the Demons of the Night.

Agnes Lynwood and her mother were safe, although weeks passed before either of them had entirely recovered from the effects of their terrible experience.

As for the idol worshipers who sought to practice their heathenish rites at the door of the metropolis of America, three of them were dead inside the cavern; twelve of them were so seriously wounded that they could not escape, and were eventually placed where they could no more indulge in their awful practices; five floated to the surface of the bay, drowned while they attempted to escape, and the remaining four were subsequently captured—in fact, before morning dawned, for in their fright they each left broad traces behind them in their flight.

THE END.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—If the foregoing story seems improbable to the general reader, he has only to search the records of the police of any city where Chinamen abound, and he will find that there are many instances of the kind in police history. This one was perhaps more serious in its nature and effect than many of them are, but the principle is the same; and it remained for Nick Carter to root out a nest of them where they had long held high revel with no fear of discovery by the authorities.

* * * * * * *

Next week's issue, No. 406, will contain "The Captain of the Vampire; or, The Smugglers of the Deep Sea." In it you will read of a phantom ship and of one of Nick Carter's strangest adventures.

The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

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TED STRONG'S SIGNAL

OR,

RACING WITH DEATH.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

ON COPPER MOUNTAIN.

Seven boys were stretched out on the grass in various comfortable attitudes. It was a warm forenoon and the boys had taken a long ride that morning from the town of Ceriso, some fifteen miles away. Now they were stretched out, resting themselves on the grassy summit of a high hill known as Copper Mountain, which gave a beautiful view over the surrounding country.

A clump of giant redwoods, centuries old, no doubt, towered above their heads, and on the other side of the trees their horses, hot and tired after the long ride, were staked out so that they could graze and roll about on the grass at will. The sky overhead was cloudless, but there was a fresh breeze blowing from the westward and it was cool and pleasant up there on the grassy slopes of Copper Mountain. The young rough riders had been staying for the past week or so at Ceriso and this morning they had gone out for a ride. The boys up to the time that they had visited Ceriso, the little California town where they were now staying, had been used to the active, hard-riding life of a ranch, and for the past week they had been very lazy and idle.

This morning, Ted Strong had proposed a long ride up to Copper Hill and the rest of the boys had assented enthusiastically.

Ted himself was stretched out on the ground, look-

ing over a map of the surrounding country, which he had bought in a store in Ceriso that morning.

Ben Tremont, big and blond and lazy, was lounging by his side puffing drowsily away at his little, black pipe. Bud Morgan, the cowboy, was seated on the grass a little distance off plaiting the loose strands at the end of his long, rawhide quirt. Beanpole, long and attenuated in figure, mournful in expression, was feeling his pulse, looking anxiously into the face of a large Waterbury watch which he carried, while chipper little Bob Martin and fat, sleepy Carl Schwartz were watching him gravely.

"Bad," said Beanpole, "very bad. My pulse has gone up two or three degrees during the last minute. I cannot understand it. I must be running into a fever. It is very alarming. I wish to goodness that I had a clinical thermometer here."

"What's the matter with you anyway?" growled Ben Tremont, who in his half-comatose condition had not quite heard what Beanpole had said.

"Matter enough," said Thad; "if I am not greatly mistaken, and if my prognostications are correct, I am surely running into a very violent attack of yellow fever."

"Rubbish!" said Ben. He knew that Beanpole was always imagining himself the prey of some deadly disease, and he knew also that Beanpole was as healthy and well as he was himself, and that is saying a good deal.

"Rubbish nothing!" retorted Beanpole. "My prognostications have surely some certainty about them. I have been making a study of yellow fever in the medical books, and let me tell you that I have all the symptoms, every one of them. If you felt as I do you would be lying on your back."

"That is just what I am doing," said Ben Tremont, placidly.

"Vos iss der brognosticationers?" asked Carl Schwartz.

"Those are the signs by which you judge whether you have a disease or not," said Beanpole; "in other words, when you make a diagnosis you prognosticate as to your future condition."

"That is a splendid explanation of the terms," chirped little Bob Martin. "As Shakespeare says: 'Plato, thou reasonest well.' "

"Who iss Blato?" queried Carl.

"He was a Greek philosopher," said Bob. "As Shakespeare says——"

"Look here, fellows," said Ted Strong, sitting up suddenly, "do you know that it is only a ride of about twenty miles from here to the town of Salt City?"

"I don'd know id pefore, bud I know id now," said Carl; "but I don'd care oof I do know it."

"What difference does it make anyway?" said Ben Tremont; "what is the use of our bothering our heads about the distance? We are not going there anyway."

"How do you know we are not?" said Kit Summers. "I think it would be a bully ride."

Ben Tremont groaned and puffed out a thicker cloud of smoke.

"Just when I was settling down to a little, comfortable rest," he said, "you fellows start in proposing another ride. What would take us over there anyway?"

"Plenty," said Kit Summers. "It is a town worth seeing. And, besides, there is something more. Ted knows about it."

Everybody looked at Ted.

"Speak up, Ted, and don't keep me in this nerve-racking suspense," said Beanpole. "You know yourself what havoc it plays with my constitution."

"Let's hear it," said Ben Tremont. "Let me hear the worst at once. I suppose it is something that I will have to get up and hustle about. I might have expected that of course. I never get comfortably settled for a nice nap but something turns up to make me jump up and half sweat myself to death. You fellows are too energetic. That is what is the matter with you."

"Nothing of the sort," said Beanpole; "we don't get exercise enough."

"But what is it as Ted has ter tell us?" said Bud Morgan, looking up from his quirt. "Jumpin' sandhills! let's hear it."

"Yes," said Bob Martin. "As Shakespeare says: 'Ope thy pestiferous and mutible jawd and tell us sumthing that will knock us pie-eyed.' "

"Go on, Teddie," said Carl Schwartz, "dell us all apouid id anyvays."

"I'll read you the letter," said Ted, drawing an envelope from his pocket and opening it. "It is from Mr. Miller, whom we left back at the Las Animas Ranch. I found it waiting for me in the post office in Ceriso this morning."

Then Ted read the letter, which ran as follows:

"DEAR TED: The last letter I received from any of the young rough riders was dated Ceriso, so I suppose that you are still there. Mr. Rossiter and myself have planned to take a trip through to the coast, and we leave to-morrow. We would like to run up to Ceriso to see you boys, but, as you know, the town is off the direct line of railroad and we cannot make any stop over at it because both of us have to be in San Francisco on business by the end of the week. We pass through Salt City, I notice, and the train stops for two hours there for dinner, as there is no dining car attached to it. We shall be there at about three in the afternoon on Monday. If you boys thought of taking a ride over there you might meet us. My daughter, Daisy, and Louise Rossiter are very anxious to see you all. They are going with us, and it is at their suggestion that I write this letter, telling you of our route. Kate Lamont, a young lady with whom you are acquainted, I believe, is with us and is going through to the coast also. Everything has been doing very well at the Las Animas Ranch since you boys left it. The herds are in fine condition. You know you fellows promised to take one of the herds northward later on in the year, and I hope that your business will allow you to get back to Las Animas soon. However, we can talk that all over when we meet on Monday. I hope that some of you, at any rate, will be able to find time to get over to Salt City as you pass through. The girls send their best regards.

"Yours truly,

"GEORGE MILLER."

"Himmel blitzen!" said Carl, "unt ve vill see der girls again! Dat iss goot. Unt dot girl, Kade Lamont! I dell you poys she is britty nice. Unt I tell you what, she vos in lofe mit me, I dinks."

"What makes you think that?" said Kit Summers, sharply.

"She always laugh ven I come aroundt. Dot shows how habby she iss ven I am aroundt, unt her peing habby ven I vos aroundt shows dot she lofes me."

"That is most excellent reasoning, in its way," chirped Bob Martin, "but it doesn't weigh much. That's the trouble with it. There is one defect in your line of argument. You think because she liked you once that she will like you as well when she sees you again?"

"Bedder!" said Carl, confidently.

"But you must remember she has never met me."

"Vell, vot oof id?"

"A great deal. Can it be that you have forgotten how fascinating I am to women? Is it possible that for the moment you have lost sight of the fact that to the average young girl I am perfectly irresistible? Is it really true that you are forgetful of my fatal gift of beauty? Beauty, as Shakespeare says, 'beauty truly blent, whose red and white nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on, and truly never did there breathe a maid who could resist making goo-goo eyes at me.' You forget also my great charm of manner, my gallant bearing, my lofty and distinguished courtesy, my diplomacy, my personal magnetism, my wonderful hypnotic powers, and my eagle eye. If you remembered all this you would realize that it would be impossible for any girl to dream of thinking of anyone else while I was around and visible to the naked eye."

"You are so small that you're not visible to the naked eye at any distance," said Ben Tremont.

"You iss talking foolishness. How could der girl like you ven she nefer seen you yet alretty? Hey, answer me dot alretty yet."

"I am famous," said Bob, placing one hand on his breast and thrusting out his foot; "already my fame as a young rough rider has penetrated to all the four quarters of the globe. Already half the girls in America are sighing their hearts out over me, and those who have had an opportunity to see my classic features in a photograph are simply crazy about me."

"Go easy there, Bob," said Beanpole in Bob's ear; "you never met this girl, but she is a dandy. We knew her before you joined the young rough riders.

And Kit is very fond of her, and you know what a hot temper he has. If he hears much more talk about her there is liable to be trouble."

Bob glanced over at Kit Summers and saw that his face looked very black.

Bob's mouth closed up with a snap. In the meantime, Ted had risen to his feet.

The other boys had gathered close about him.

"Who's in it for the ride to Salt City?" he asked.

An affirmative shout went up, in which even Ben Tremont joined, and a moment later the boys were busy saddling up and preparing their horses for the journey.

It did not take the boys long to saddle up, for they were experts at this work.

"We will have lunch at Salt City," said Ted, "and there is a fifteen-mile ride before we get to it, so it's up to us to hurry up. Mount!"

As one man the boys swung themselves into their saddles and a moment later their horses were picking their way down the steep side of Copper Mountain.

CHAPTER II.

TOM BUTTS.

The train dispatcher on the through line at Salt City was a fresh young man with a high opinion of himself. He thought that because he happened to do a thing, that thing was all right, and he spent the greater part of his time admiring his own distinctive qualities. He was laboring under the delusion that he was a great man and that he was being buried by being kept in an out-of-the-way place like Salt City.

He thought that he should have been a division superintendent on the railroad, at the very least, and consequently he paid very little attention to the really important duties of his office. He was a tall, slim youth, a cigarette was always hanging out of the corner of his mouth, and his cheeks were pale and hollow. His face wore an expression of chronic discontent, and his finger tips were stained yellow with nicotine.

At about two o'clock he strolled over from the railroad to a restaurant on the opposite side of the street to get something to eat. He did not feel very hungry, and he was standing in the bar attached to the restaurant, sharpening up his appetite with a drink of whisky, when he heard a noisy clatter of hoofs on the street outside.

He looked up and saw that there were seven boys on horseback, who had just ridden up to the station and were drawn up in front of it. They were of all sizes, some large and some small, one very stout and one very slim one, but all were dressed in neatly fitting khaki clothes and all wore large, brown sombreros.

They all sat in their saddles as though they were good riders, and the dry perspiration on the flanks of their horses showed that they had been ridden hard that day.

Tom Butts tossed off his whisky, looking at these fellows with a weary, discontented expression of face.

"Nice-looking gang of kids," he muttered. "I suppose they have come in here thinking that we will order out a special train with a flat car for their horses all ready for their accommodation. They are trying to get some information about the starting and leaving of trains out of the ticket agent. He don't know anything and I am not going to hurry over there to answer their questions. I am going to take my time at my lunch and let them wait for a while. People like that seem to think that I am a sort of slave for the public."

Butts walked into the restaurant, sat down at a table and ordered his lunch.

He was just starting it when one of the fellows in khaki suits stepped in through the doorway to the street.

"I am looking for the train dispatcher here," he said. "I want to learn something about a train that is expected here this afternoon."

The blue-eyed girl with a pompadour who sat at the cashier's desk favored Ted with a beaming smile.

"There he is, sitting over at that far table," she said; "there is no use talking to him, however. He thinks he's too good to talk much to people. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Ted looked at the young lady at the cashier's desk.

For a moment she let her blue eyes rest on his, then she dropped them suddenly and smiled in a self-conscious fashion.

Ted saw that the young lady was not averse to a flirtation, but Ted had no time to think of such things at present, and he never had the inclination for it anyway.

"I will go over and speak to him myself," he said.

The girl looked at Ted again, dropped her eyes and smiled and flushed. This was all thrown away, however, for Ted had walked past her toward the table at which Tom Butts was sitting.

Butts had been watching the young rough rider narrowly. He saw the efforts of the girl to attract his attention and this made him more sour than ever. He sometimes took the girl out himself, and he did not like to see her so attentive to anyone else.

As Ted approached him he dropped his eyes over his plate and appeared to be busy eating his dinner and oblivious to everything else in the room. Ted stopped behind his chair and cleared his throat, but Butts never looked up.

"Gentleman to see you, Mr. Butts," said the girl at the cashier's desk, in a sharp, high voice; then she broke off into a meaningless giggle.

Butts looked up with the haughtiest expression that he could assume. He stared at Ted for a moment, lifted a cigarette which lay still lit beside him on the table, and took a long whiff of it. After he had allowed the smoke to escape in two slow streams through his nostrils he looked again at Ted, who had been standing all the while watching this performance.

"What do you want?" he said.

Ted liked neither the manner nor the tone of this young gentleman, but he paid little attention to them.

"I want to know when the train—the through train bound west from Santa Fé—that is due here this afternoon arrives," he said.

Butts looked at him again, repeated the performance with the cigarette, took a sip from his cup of coffee, and answered:

"There's no through train from Santa Fé that arrives here this afternoon."

"But I know there is," said Ted. "I expect to meet some friends who are to arrive on it."

Butts smoked his cigarette down to the bitter end and threw it away.

"I suppose that you know more about this railroad than I do," he said; "I don't know of any such train."

Ted was getting a little hot under the collar.

"If you don't know it you ought to know it," he said, "for I am perfectly certain that there is such a train."

Butts was the only man eating in the restaurant, and the girl with the blond pompadour drew near to hear the conversation between him and Ted.

"I am busy eating my lunch now," said Butts, with a drawl; "I haven't time to waste talking to you."

The insolent manner in which Butts said this was a little more than Ted could stand. He bent over the table at which the train dispatcher was eating and laid his hand on it.

"Look here," he said, "if you haven't time to talk to me and give me the information that I want you'll have to make time! I have a right to ask information of you. You seem to have quite a wrong impression as to your position here."

Butts looked up suddenly, his cheeks growing a little paler. He saw that the face of the boy who was bending over him was very brown and healthy, in great contrast to his own sallow cheeks, and that the hand that rested on the table looked very strong and powerful.

The shoulders and neck of this young stranger looked very powerful, and beside that there was a big Colt revolver hanging in a dark leather case at his hip.

Butts felt a little frightened when he noticed all these things, but he also noticed that the blond girl was watching what went on very closely, and he did not want to appear at a disadvantage before her. He gulped nervously and then bent over his dinner again.

"I can't get you any information here," he said, sulkily. "I have a right to eat my dinner, haven't I, without people butting in and talking to me?"

"Certainly you have a right to eat your dinner," said

Ted, "but you also have a right to be civil to people who speak to you. Just bear in mind the fact that there are a few friends of mine outside who would be tickled to death to have the job of tossing you in a blanket."

Butts stared at the door and saw that the other fellows in khaki had dismounted and were lounging about outside.

He hesitated a minute, not liking to back down in the presence of the girl. But the sight of Ben Tremont's colossal figure, which appeared in the doorway at that moment, decided him.

"If you just wait till I go across to the office," he said, "I'll tell you what you want to know."

CHAPTER III.

UNCIVIL TREATMENT.

"Well," called Ben Tremont, from the doorway, "what's the news? Has the train been wrecked? Something to make me work hard, I'll bet!"

"I can't find out much at present," said Ted, walking toward him; "there is a man in here who is supposed to know all about the trains, but he is too busy eating at present to give us very much information."

The two boys stepped outside.

"Let's wait out here for him," said Ted; "the atmosphere is pleasanter out here. This train dispatcher here seems to be a fresh sort of customer, who thinks he is too important to speak to anyone."

"Too important to speak to anyone!" said Bud Morgan, sticking his head in the doorway. "Jumpin' sandhills! Let me get at him. Let me ride my broncho around his neck a couple of times to let him see how it feels to be a runaway. Just say the word, Ted, and I'll go in and pull him apart and bring the pieces out on a tray."

"Show me der man," said Carl Schwartz, ambling up to the group at the door; "led me at him. Oof he pokes himself mit der eye on my fist I bade you it vill hurt me. I iss a britty goot fighder ven I gets mine temper up."

"Let me back to him," said Bob Martin; "let me whisper a few Shakespearian quotations in his ear. I will soon bring him around to a more reasonable attitude. All he needs is a few quotations from the lips of the immortal bard. I am the man to give him those words of wisdom."

"What that fellow needs is a good dose of medicine," said Beanpole, looking in at the sallow face of Butts; "he has the jaundice or some other trouble of the liver, without a doubt. That is what makes him so pale."

"He has a swelled head," said Kit Summers; "that is all that is the matter with him. I would just like to have him on the back of a bucking broncho for about ten minutes. I think that would put him in an altogether different frame of mind."

Butts could hear that these fellows, clad in khaki, were talking among themselves, and he suspected that it must be about him. The girl, seeing all the boys at the door, wandered over in that direction and listened to what they were saying. She giggled and stared over at Butts.

An angry red flush came into the sallow cheeks of the train dispatcher. He gulped down the rest of his lunch hurriedly, and marched over toward the door.

"Gangway for a petty officer!" shouted Ben Tremont, stepping to one side.

"Make way for his lordship," said Bob Martin; "can't you see that he hates a crowd?"

"Give him plenty of room to walk in," said Bud Morgan; "he's a high stepper, shore thing! Give him plenty of room ter sling his hoofs around."

"He'll kill himself throwing out his chest that way," said Beanpole; "he may burst a blood vessel or injure one of his lungs."

"Keep quiet!" commanded Ted. "We don't want to pick a fight with this man. Get out of his way and treat him civilly."

The boys drifted off to either side as Butts came to the door, but, as usual, Carl was slower than the others and couldn't get away in time. He made a wild scramble and fell against Butts, nearly knocking him over.

Butts swore volubly so that the girl with the pompa-

dour covered her lips with her hands and looked horrified.

"Get out of my way, you fat Dutchman!" he said. "What do you mean by blocking up the passageway this way?"

"I don't mean nothings," muttered Carl, scrambling about on all fours.

Butts aimed a blow at the head of the German youth, but, either by good luck or adroitness, Carl dodged it. Then Ben Tremont caught hold of him by the collar and dragged him out of the way.

Butts strode past the boys and went over toward his office.

"I am going upstairs after him," said Ted; "he promised to tell me something about this train when he got through eating."

"A nice, civil, pleasant-spoken, little maverick," said Bud Morgan, winking at the girl with the pompadour; "don't you think so, miss?"

The blond girl made a face indicative of the greatest disgust.

"I think he's horrid," she said.

She smiled at Bud and found that the cowboy appreciated her smiles a great deal more than Ted Strong.

"A feller like thet shore makes me tired," said Bud, leaning gracefully against the counter, "but when a feller meets a young lady like yerself, why it shore makes up for all the hard knocks in life."

"I'm afraid you are a jollier," said the girl, with a smile, 'but you fellows had better look out for that Tom Butts. He is mad clear through now, and he has an awful temper. There's a gang of yardmen and engine wipers about here who are under his orders, and they are a pretty tough gang, let me tell you. It's just as likely as not that he'll set them at you fellows."

"I'd be willin' ter fight twenty station men jest for the pleasure of lookin' at ye," said Bud. "Jumpin' sandhills! After a feller has been ranchin' it fer the better part of his days he gets so's he kin appreciate a pretty girl when he see's her."

"Are you a real, sure-enough cowboy?" asked the girl, opening her blue eyes wide. "Some cattlemen got in here once in a while, but I've never met a real cowboy."

"I am ther real thing," said Bud; "jumpin' sandhills! I hev been ranchin' an punchin' cows ever sence I was knee high ter a grasshopper. These other fellers air ranchers, too. Thet young fellow ye seed first, he's ther capting of the young rough riders."

Then Bud Morgan went into a long conversation with the young lady, telling her all about the young rough riders, how they were a party of boys who were originally organized to run a ranch in Dakota, and how they had made a great success of the Black Mountain Ranch there before coming farther south.*

In the meantime, Ted Strong had followed the train dispatcher to the upper floor, in which his office was situated. He noticed that before he entered the building Butts had called a tough-looking yardman to his side and told him something in a low voice, pointing toward the young rough riders who were still gathered about the door of the restaurant, but he paid no attention to this.

When Butts got through talking to this fellow he ran straight upstairs, paying no attention to Ted. Ted went up after him, however, and followed him across the room until Butts threw himself into a chair before a big desk.

On that desk was spread a yellow paper, the dispatch slip, showing the routes, starting time and leaving time, of all the trains on that division of the road. Butts glanced over this, lit another cigarette, and looked up at Ted.

"Well," he said, "go ahead and ask your questions now."

"There is a train due here this afternoon from Santa Fé," said Ted; "a through train. I want to know what time it gets here and how long we will have to wait for it."

"There is no through train due here this afternoon," said Butts, glancing at the slip again. "There is no use telling me there is. I have the paper before me

*The reader who is not already acquainted with the exploits of which Bud was speaking will find them all set forth in the early numbers of the Young Rough Riders Weekly.

here. Now you might as well go downstairs right away and not stay here asking foolish questions."

He expected the young rough rider to leave when he said this, but to his surprise Ted remained standing stock-still in front of him.

A telegraph instrument had started clicking at the desk alongside of Butts, and Butts, who acted as operator as well as train dispatcher when the regular operator at the small junction was out, seized paper and pencil and began to take down the message that was coming in over the wire. In the meantime, Ted was listening to it intently. All the little clicking sounds that came from the sounder were familiar to him. He had worked as a telegraph operator for a while when he was in the army in the Philippines, and he had mastered the Morse code thoroughly, and had never forgotten it. He understood the message that was coming in quite as well as Butts himself. It was as follows.

"Special train with President Rossiter aboard five hours late. Delayed by washout. Arrive at Salt City at ten. Stay overnight. Have siding ready."

This message was signed with the code number of an operator at a point considerably farther to the eastward. Butts finished taking down the message, filed it, and looked once more at Ted.

"There is no use in your waiting here any longer," he said; "I have nothing more to say to you."

"I have heard about all I want to know," said Ted "I see that there was a through train expected here this afternoon, and that you refused to tell me about it."

Butts gasped with astonishment. He had not thought it possible that this sun-browned, athletic fellow, in the khaki clothes, would understand the Morse code.

"How do you know that?" he said. "Who told you that?"

Ted pointed toward the instrument.

"That's what told me," he said. "I know the code. And what I would like you to tell me now is why you refused to give me information about this train."

"That isn't a regular train. That's a special with Rossiter, one of the directors of the road, aboard."

Ted was about to reply when he heard a loud uproar outside. He dashed to the window and saw that something had happened during his absence. Kit Summers, Bob Martin and Ben Tremont were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with several big yardmen, while the other boys were trying to check their horses which had been stampeded down the street.

Ted dashed for the door and went down the stairs two at a time.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS IN SALT CITY.

When Ted had left the other boys to go upstairs into the train dispatcher's office, the remainder of the young rough riders had remained crowded about the restaurant door, glancing idly up and down the street and looking for something to amuse themselves with. Salt City was not a very busy town, and the streets about the railway yards were deserted. In fact, it was only owing to the railway yards and the number of men employed there that there was any city at all at this point.

The boys had dismounted from their horses at the station and hitched them up on a line which Bud Morgan had stretched between two snubbing posts, making it fast at each end. The horses had been used pretty well that day, and they were tired.

"Let's go in and eat something to pass the time away," said Beanpole, gazing in at the window of the restaurant; "I see some rather nice-looking pies in there, and I don't mind admitting the fact that I am pretty hungry. It's a bad thing for me to take much exercise on an empty stomach, and I ought to eat something right away if I don't want to have another attack of dyspepsia."

"I iss hungry mineselluf," said Carl Schwartz; "I don'd know vedder der bies iss goot vor you or not, Peanpole. Berhaps I had bedder eat one first to see vedder it does you any harm or not."

"The only harm it will do me will be owing to the fact that I won't get it myself," said Beanpole.

"That won't do you much harm," said Bob Martin, "because there are plenty more pies left in the place. But what is the use of eating now? We want to wait until the train with Mr. Miller and Mr. Rossiter and the girls arrives. Then we will have a good dinner. Don't spoil your appetite by filling up on pies."

"I have no appetite, anyway," said Beanpole.

"I haf no abbetide mineselluf," said Carl, "but I dink all der same dot one oof der bies might like to be eaten py me."

At this moment Bud Morgan came running out of the restaurant. He was looking over the heads of the

other boys, and whatever it was he saw caused him considerable excitement.

"Jumpin' sandhills!" he cried, "ther hosses! Look at 'em! Somebody hes gone and turned 'em loose. Look at 'em run! Get after 'em, boys, and then we'll soak ther mavericks what done it!"

"The horses!" cried Kit Summers, wheeling around and looking at them.

As he looked two or three men were busied about the heads of the animals. They had cut the line which Bud Morgan had stretched from snubbing post to snubbing post, and just as Bud Morgan had turned his eyes in their direction they had set all the animals free and were busied lashing at them with sticks and throwing nuts and bolts and other missiles at them in an evident effort to stampede them.

"They are stampeding the horses!" cried Bud Morgan, starting on a rush across the street.

"Stop der stambede!" squealed Carl Schwartz, tumbling after them.

"Great Shakespeare's ghost!" cried Bob Martin, also running across the street. "This is an outrage!"

"Catch that first one, Bud!" said Kit, while he dashed across the street.

"Wait till I get at those fellows," said Beanpole; "they must be suffering from some mental disease to think of doing such a thing."

Ben Tremont said nothing, but he ran as fast as any of the other boys, for all his great weight and bulk. He singled out one of the horses which was careering up and down the street in a panic-stricken manner and caught it by the bridle. A moment later he had it hitched to the snubbing post and was busy pacifying another of the frightened horses.

Meanwhile, the five or six men, who had started all this excitement, had drawn off a little way down the track. They were rough-looking fellows, clad in rough, greasy shirts, open at the neck and short in the sleeves. Their faces were grimy with oil and coal dust, and they looked as tough a looking gang as the boys had ever encountered.

Hot-headed Kit Summers was too angry at this moment to pay much attention to the horses, which were running wild up and down the stony street, and which Bud Morgan and Beanpole were trying to catch. He was so mad at the fellows who, for no apparent reason but wanton mischief, had started them off in their flight, that he could think of nothing else for the moment.

He ran straight toward them, although they were all grown men and brawny fellows, and, although he could see other men of the same class emerging from one of the roundhouses in the yard and running to their assistance.

"What do you mean by starting those horses off?" he cried.

The answer to this question was in the form of an iron bolt that whizzed through the air in near proximity to Kit's head.

"Git outer this yard!" yelled one of the men. "You fellers hev no right in here!"

The man who gave this order started toward Kit.

If he expected the dark-eyed boy to be afraid of him he was mistaken, for Kit never hesitated but kept right on toward him. When Kit's temper was up, there wasn't anything on earth that could frighten him.

The big fellow, who had rushed for Kit, raised his fist to strike the boy. But Kit was as quick as a cat. He ducked just in time to let the blow whizz past over his head, and the next instant his fist caught the workman a stinging crack across the mouth that sent him staggering back.

"Soak him on the head!" yelled another man, raising a big monkey wrench which he held in his hand and aiming a blow at the boy. Had the blow landed Kit would surely have been cut and stunned, and he might have received a fractured skull, but it never landed.

A great, muscular hand caught the upraised arm of the man in a grip such as he had never felt before. He turned to find himself in the grasp of a big, blond fellow, who looked as broad as a house and as strong as a bull.

With a cry of rage he lifted the wrench again, but it was wrested from his grasp as though he had no more strength than a baby, and the next instant Ben Tremont gave him a mighty shove that sent him reeling to the ground.

Kit Summers had dashed impetuously ahead of the other boys, and a second later he felt himself in a hand-to-hand struggle with two of the engine oilers. The others were close behind him, however.

Bud Morgan was catching the two horses which still remained free, and the other boys, led on by Ben Tremont, were dashing to the assistance of Kit.

This was one of the few occasions when big Ben really woke up and showed what was in him. His blue eyes were wide open now and sparkled with the joy of battle. His great body plunged heavily through the

group of men who had surrounded Kit Summers, and his fists shot out, one after the other, and sent two of his opponents tumbling on the ground.

In the meantime, Kit Summers was having a hard time of it. He was fighting savagely and silently, as he always did, but one heavy fellow had come around him from behind and thrown his arm around his neck in an effort to strangle him.

Kit felt himself being borne backward, and a heavy fist struck him full in the face. At that instant a familiar voice sounded in his ear.

"I'm pretty sick and I need exercise, so I might as well have it right now."

It was Beanpole who uttered these words, and he sent his long arms swinging about him like the arms of a windmill.

One hard, bony fist landed on the nose of the man who was throttling Kit Summers. He loosened his hold on Kit immediately.

"Come on if you dare!" yelled Beanpole. "I am only a nervous wreck, and I am liable to die any time, so I might as well die fighting."

But Beanpole looked like anything but dying as he plunged madly into the fray, and the railroad men made way for him as he charged forward.

"Hoch der Kaiser!" yelled Carl Schwartz, who was dashing along as fast as his fat legs would carry him. *"Himmel blitz!* Vatch der flying Dutchmans in action. Vatch me, poys. I iss der greatest fighter in der bunch. I learned der vay mit der Cherman Army."

"Once more to the attack!" yelled Bob Martin, in his shrill voice, close behind Carl. "As my old friend, Shakespeare, remarks: 'Whenever you see a head, hit it.'"

Carl ran along with his head down and his eyes fastened on the ground without having any particular idea as to where he was going. Running along in this fashion, he went full tilt into one of the group of men who were gathered about Kit Summers. Carl's round bullet head, clothed with a scanty growth of flaxen hair, went into his stomach like a cannon ball, and he keeled over with a wild yell of fright.

"Good shot, Carl," yelled Bob Martin, tripping up another of the men and sending him headlong; "I never knew there was so much in your head. It must be solid instead of hollow, as I thought it was."

For a moment the boys were in the midst of a mad fight with the railroad men.

Kit Summers, who had dashed forward between the others, was in the forefront of the fray. He was knocked clean from his feet by a blow from one man, but he bounced up again, his face bleeding, but as eager for fight as ever. Again Kit was sent reeling, but this time Ben Tremont landed a heavy swing on the man who had knocked Kit down twice.

The fellow said afterward that it felt as though he had been hit with a battering ram, and he went right over on his back.

It was at this instant that Ted came dashing out of the doorway of the train dispatcher's office.

"Quit that fighting!" he yelled. "Here, boys, drop back out of the yards!"

The boys heard him and began to retreat slowly before their assailants. The railroad men set up a hoarse cry of triumph and started after the boys.

"Get the horses!" yelled Ted.

At the same time he caught his own steed, which was still loose, and spurred it right across the station platform and in among the tracks.

Kit Summers, as he was the first to rush at the railroad men, was the last to retreat. He had heard Ted's order, but to retreat before an enemy or show any fear is the hardest task that Kit Summers could be asked to perform.

At Ted's command the other boys began to drop slowly back, but Kit was the last to retire. When turning, he stumbled and fell. Seeing this, the railroad gang set up a yell of triumph. One big fellow started directly for the prostrate form of the boy, a heavy bar, which was used for setting switches, brandished in his hand.

He was half drunk, it was evident, and in a murderous mood, and in another moment the bar would have landed across Kit, who was still scrambling on all fours, had not Ted Strong caught sight of his position.

On the instant he sank his spurs into the sides of his horse and the animal sprang forward in a great bound.

As it sprang, Ted leaned forward in the saddle and hooked one foot, clear from the stirrup, up in the cantle. Then, as he dashed past Kit, he bent still lower and caught the boy by the shoulders.

Kit had all his wits about him, and he reached up his hand and caught the pommel of the saddle himself. A moment later he had been half lifted, half vaulted to the back of the horse behind Ted Strong, while the pony had never checked its gallop or turned its course.

Ted let it go straight ahead for the man with the [illegible] who turned with a yell of astonishment [illegible]

a moment he thought he was going to be crushed beneath the hoofs of the horse, but Ted did not intend to do this.

He did intend to give the man a good fright, however, and he only allowed his horse to swerve when he was right on top of the fellow. As it was, the shoulder of the horse hit him and at the same time Ted lifted his foot slightly from the stirrup and let him have it hard in the ribs as he went past.

The man went over backwards, the crowbar dropping from his hand and clattering on the ground. Ted wheeled his horse and swung back across the station platform, which echoed strangely to the steel-shod hoofs and out to the street again.

The other boys were all mounted and ranged up along the street. Ben Tremont was holding Kit's horse, and every one of the young rough riders set up a cheer as they saw the black-eyed boy, dusty and bleeding, but as full of pluck as ever, clinging to the back of the horse behind his young commander.

As he passed his own horse he swung to the ground and then up into his own saddle again, and Ben Tremont, passing the bridle over the head of the horse, handed it to him.

"That was a close shave," he grunted.

Beside Ben Tremont sat Bud Morgan. He had his big Colt six-shooter in his hand, poised ready for a shot, and his eyes were snapping dangerously as he looked over toward the mob of station men who had gathered together on the platform.

"Put that gun up," said Ted, sharply.

"But, say, pard," said Bud, appealingly, and looking lovingly along the shiny blue barrel, "cain't I jest shoot up two or three o' these here fellers they've meddled with ther wrong bunch of fellers?"

"No gun play," said Ted, sternly; "put it back, Bud; we don't want to start a row. Those guns are only for defending ourselves, not for shooting up places."

Bud looked at Ted and saw that the young rough rider meant what he said. The gun slipped quickly back into the belt.

Ted now wheeled his horse and faced the railroad men. They were a little startled at the fighting qualities shown by these khaki-clad fellows, and their evident military discipline. They also noted the big revolvers that the fellows carried, and they attempted no further hostilities.

"You fellows had no right to stampede our horses," said Ted. "You evidently were ordered to drive us out of the yard and off the station. This station was meant for the public, and we are part of the public. We are waiting for the train here, and we are going to continue waiting as long as we feel so disposed. Has anyone any objections to make?"

But no objections were made.

CHAPTER V.

SPENDING AN EVENING AT SALT CITY.

Ted glanced around at his followers to see how much they had suffered in the recent *mêlée*. Carl Schwartz had a few scratches across his face, and Beanpole complained loudly that he had suffered a dislocation of one of his vertebræ and that his days on earth were numbered.

"I feel perfectly certain that I have suffered a serious shock to my solar plexus. I know only too well how much to be dreaded an accident of that kind is. Already I feel shooting pains darting up and down my spinal column. My temperature has gone up two and a half degrees. And just look at my knuckles."

As a matter of fact, the lean and lanky Beanpole had sailed into the railraad men so furiously that his hands were cut across the knuckles from the force of the blows he had struck.

"I am not hurt much myself," chirped Bob Martin, "but Heaven help the fellows that I hit! You know that I am a very hard hitter. I must have knocked some of those railroad men clear out of sight. I hit them so hard that they seemed to fade away in front of me. And some one has stepped on my toes and hurt my corns. I believe it was Carl Schwartz."

"I don'd know oof your corn stebbed on me or not," said Carl; "I mineselluf hit der men mit my face unt scratched me on der nose. Oof I do dot vonce more I will pe sorry for it."

It was Kit Summers who had suffered more in the fight than any of the boys. He was the most headlong and impetuous in the crowd, and he had dashed into it without a thought of his own safety. His nose had been started bleeding, and he had received a cut on the lip.

He had wiped the blood from his face by this time and looked fairly presentable.

He smiled at Ted as he glanced at him.

"I guess we did pretty well, and we didn't pull a gun, either," he said. "I'm not hurt much. A tap on my nose will set it bleeding, so that doesn't count. I guess those fellows got worse than they gave us, all right. I know that a couple of men that Ben landed on saw about twenty thousand stars. And I saw Carl butt into one fellow with his head so that I guess he thought he was struck by a torpedo."

"I haf a hard headt alretty," said Carl; "I iss a goot fighter mit mine headt."

"That is because your head is solid bone clear through," said Bob Martin.

"Yah," said Carl, proudly, "mine headt is britty thick, you bade your life. I haf a wery thick headt."

"But did you see me?" said Bob. "Did you note the power of my mighty arm? Did you see how I picked those big fellows up and tossed them in the air high above my head? Did you notice how they scattered, like autumn leaves before the storm, at my mighty approach? I tell you, boys, it was magnificent to see me fighting those fellows. It was a wonderful sight to see my amazing strength and ferocity. As Shakespeare says: 'Like a mighty lion he raged among his foes.'"

While this conversation was going on among the boys the railroad men had gathered in a group. Two of them had scalp wounds, which they had received when they were knocked down. One man, who had been struck by Bennpole, was feeling his front teeth to see if they were all there yet. A fellow who had encountered Ben Tremont was still partially stunned from the effect of the crashing blow he had received, and the man whom Carl had butted into was seated on a bench, very pale and sick from the blow he had received in the stomach.

They eyed the young rough riders in silence for a moment, muttering among themselves, but the line of well-armed, well-mounted boys looked a dangerous thing to attack, and the sample they had already tasted of the fighting qualities of the young rough riders did not prompt them to wish for more.

After a moment's hesitation they went back into the railroad yard.

At this moment, Tom Butts emerged from the office, lit a cigarette, and glanced about him. A scowl came into his face as he saw the young rough riders seated near the station on their horses and his own men retreating up the yard.

He had witnessed the fight from the window of his office, and it did not seem possible to him that his gang of train men and engine oilers had failed to make mince-meat of this crowd of boys.

Tom Butts advanced toward Ted Strong, who was sitting on his horse close to the station platform.

"What do you fellows mean by raising a row like this here?" he snarled. "I gave you the information you wanted. Don't you know that this station is not the proper place for a gang of young loafers?"

"Loafers!" yelled Bud Morgan, in his shrill, cowboy voice, "let me at that feller! Let me bore a few holes inter him! I'll show him whether I am a loafer or not!"

Tom dodged back instinctively at this cry. He saw the reckless look in the eyes of the cowboy, and he verily believed that Bud was likely to draw and fire at a moment's notice. In his old, reckless days, before he had joined the young rough riders and come under the influence of Ted Strong and the other boys, Bud would have thought nothing of firing at a man for less than this, but he was a good deal different now.

Ted gave him a signal to keep his gun in its place and also cast a warning glance at Kit Summers, who, he knew, would like nothing better than to fight with this insolent young train dispatcher.

"You fellows had better clear out of here before I send for the authorities to clear you out," he said. "If you think you can shoot up this town you are mistaken. The place for you fellows is a jail."

"You had better stop that sort of talk," said Ted, quietly, but in a tone that frightened Butts somehow. "The fight was not brought on by us. I have a pretty good idea that you put those fellows up to attack us, and some of them got the punishment which you deserve. I am not going to stay here at present. I know that the train we are waiting for does not come in until nine, and we are going away to get something

to eat first. But we are coming back here at about dusk, and we are going to stay here as long as we feel like it. Do you understand?"

Evidently Butts did understand. He stood where he was, silent and angry, while the young rough riders, at a word from Ted, swung about and trotted off up the street.

He stood silent, gritting his teeth together, until the young rough riders had disappeared around the corner and until the sound of hoofbeats had died away completely.

"I must get even with those fellows some way," he muttered; "I must."

He turned suddenly and called to a porter who was wheeling a truck along the station platform.

"Tell Mike Hicks that I want to see him at my office," he said.

He turned about, went upstairs, and sat down at his desk. A few moments later Mike Hicks entered, cap in hand, bare armed, covered with oil and engine dirt, and with a big, black discoloration under one eye. Hicks was the foreman of the yard gang. He was a hard drinker, a reckless character, and was only employed by the railroad because he was a good workman and because he had a wonderful command over the other men. He stood nearly six feet high, but his great shoulders were slouched forward and he stooped so that he did not look anywhere near that height. He had a tremendous pair of arms and a deep chest that told of great physical strength. He was well known about the yards as a bully and a bruiser, and there was not a man about the place who would stand up to him in a fist fight.

"What'cher want?" he growled, glaring at Butts from under his bushy eyebrows.

"I want to talk to you for a minute. Were you in that scrap?"

"Shure."

"I don't approve of scrapping about here, you know that."

Hicks grinned and said nothing.

"Those fellows have probably gone up to the Coronado Hotel, that is the only place where they can put up their horses. They will be coming back here a little after dark. It would be an easy thing for a gang of roughs to tackle them and beat the life out of them, and here is a ten-dollar bill for yourself. Do you understand?"

"You want these fellers done up after dark ternight?"

Butts glanced nervously around the room. There was no one near enough to see the money pass between them or to hear what they were saying.

"I want them to get a good beating," said Butts, in a low tone; "from the look of your face, I judge that you are one of the fellows who was scrapping with them, and I dare say you want to get even with them on your own account."

"Betcher life I do!" said Hicks. "I got poked hard in ther face by that big mutt, an' I ain't ther feller ter take that from anybody! See?"

"Well," said Tom Butts, "get out of here quick, and after you quit work to-night you can lay for these fellows. They will be coming back from the Coronado along the street a little after dark, I expect. I am going up there for supper and a few hours sleep, for I am going to be around here to-night. A special, with the president of the road, is coming through at about ten, I expect, and I want to be on hand when that happens. I will see, if possible, that the fellows start along the road for the station here about eight, and you can have your gang waiting there. Now, skip! That's all I have to say, and I don't want you to be seen hanging around here."

Hicks ducked his head and winked. Then he slouched out of the room and down the stairs. Butts bent over his yellow dispatch sheet again, looking over the bundle of telegrams that announced the arrival and departure of trains, and making the entries in his sheet.

By looking over this sheet he could get a comprehensive view of everything that was going on on the various lines of the division, and he could have accurate ideas as to which tracks were clear, so that he would know when and where to dispatch the trains that went out from Salt City Junction. At present, how-

ever, he was not in the best possible condition for work that required a great deal of steadiness and accuracy. He had been in a bad temper and besides that he had just entered into a plot which might land him in prison if it were discovered. His face was very pale and his lips twitched curiously. His hand shook and trembled as he made his entries in the dispatch sheet. He had never felt so nervous and shaken up in his life before.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESULT OF UNSTEADY NERVES.

The young rough riders were seated at supper at the Coronado Hotel.

They had found that this was the only inn of any size in the town, and their horses were now all unsaddled and munching away at their oats in the long sheds adjoining the hotel building. The boys themselves had a big table all to themselves. They had hired a room in which they could wash and make themselves presentable, and they had all washed up and freshened themselves before ordering the meal.

"I tell you what," said Bob Martin, "that was a pretty lively time we had up at the station to-day! That was as fast a scrap as we have tackled in a long time."

"Came near being too fast for me," laughed Kit Summers, whose lip was still swollen from the blow he had received that afternoon.

"This here fist fightin' makes me shore tired," said Bud Morgan; "I don't think it's befittin' a gentleman, nohow. In ther good ole days up at Abilene we useter unlimber with our guns an' do it all in a quiet an' gentleman-like manner."

"I nefer saw no gun dot vas kerviet ven it had der trigger bulled," said Carl, supping up his soup with a noise that resembled the sound of a rhinoceros feeding. "All der guns made der report ven der trigger was pulled. Did you use smokeless powder so id don'd make no noise, yah?"

"How would smokeless powder prevent the gun from making a noise?" said Beanpole, disputedly.

"You make me tired with your talk. It gets me irritated, and then I lose my appetite."

"I hope you have lost it by this time," said Ben Tremont; "if you don't lose it pretty soon you'll eat up everything in the hotel."

"I am britty near finished mineselluf," said Carl; "ven I geds through I vill sing you a song."

"Hurry up and sing, Carl," said Bob Martin; "I just love to hear you sing. So do we all of us. Everybody who is any good likes good music. You know what Shakespeare says: 'The man who has no music in his soul, and is not moved by concourse of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils; let no such man be trusted any further than you can throw a bull by the horns, for he is a lobster and a crook, and will work the double cross on you just as soon as he gets a chance?'"

"That's shore a fine quote from the pote," said Bud; "I dunno how ye remember all them things, Bob."

"I've got a great head on me," said Bob. "I have a wonderful memory. I have trained it from my youth till now. 'It serves me well, indeed,' as Shakespeare says."

"I used to have a good memory," said Beanpole, moodily, helping himself to a third piece of roast beef, "but when a man's health is undermined his memory will go back on him, sure thing. The brain depends for its nourishment on the body."

"Ye shore must hev a mighty fat brain," said Bud Morgan, "for yer body is mighty thin. Jumpin' sandhills! ye takes as much nourishment as any man I ever seed."

"My appetite isn't what it ought to be," said Beanpole; "I can eat occasionally, but, after all, it is very fitful. I never feel hungry until several hours after a meal."

"I didn't think it was that bad," said Bud; "I thought from the way ye eat thet ye was hungry all ther time."

"Do you think you are ready to give us a song now, Carl?" asked Kit Summers, with a twinkle in his eye. All the boys knew that Carl, while he was very fond of singing, had no ideas of music whatever, and that, be-

unless this, he generally made hush of the words of any song he sung.

"Go ahead, Carl," said Bob Martin, "we are all waiting. The room is empty except for us."

"They say that music after dinner is good for the digestion," said Ted.

"Then sing by all means," said Beanpole, "and sing soon. I am having a lot of trouble with my digestion, and music is good for the digestion."

Thus adjured, Carl got on his feet, unbuttoned his coat so as to have plenty of room to breathe, threw out his chest and opened his mouth wide, clearing his throat several times before commencing. Then he sang as follows:

"I dreamt dot I dvelt mit marbled halls,
Mit varnish unt paint on der si-i-ide.
Unt oof all der beobles in der valls,
I was der hope unt bri-i-ide.
Der vas efrything der dot der heart could vish,
Unt nobody vos to plame,
But oof all der dings vot blessed me most,
You loved me still der same, you loved me, loved me sti-i-ill
der same!"

At the conclusion of this remarkable ditty the boys burst out into uproarious applause.

"Bully!" said Ted; "you ought to go into grand opera."

"Great!" said Kit; "you remind me of Jean de Reszke. He has a voice just like yours, just the same quality and pitch, but he doesn't use it half so well."

"That did me a lot of good," said Beanpole. "Sing some more. I think I will die of my diseases pretty soon, and listening to singing like that makes death seem pleasant."

"Did you make up them there words?" asked Bud Morgan.

Tom Tremont only grunted and lit his pipe.

"I don'd make oop der vords oof der songs," explained Carl; "der vords iss sung of me. Dot song iss from der obera oof der Bohemian Beer—I mean der Bohemian Girl."

"Give us some more from the same opera," said Ted.

"Go on," said Bob Martin; "we like it. As Shakespeare says: 'Music hath charms to lift the savage breast and make it rise as if 'twere filled with yeast.'"

"All right," said Carl; "I haf anoder wery good song. Oof I don'd sing der oder first I vould haf sung it before. Here is der song:

"'Der heart powed down mit veight of woe,
Still to der hopes,——"

Carl went no further in his song, for at that moment the door was thrown open and two men hurried into the room.

"Here, there is light here," said one of them, who was evidently a telegraph operator at the railroad station; "here is the dispatch sheet. You can see it for yourself. You have sent the freight train right up on that track! Look and see! It's bound to crash into the special at the bridge over the Ceriso."

One look at the other man, who entered with the operator, made the boys gasp with surprise. It was Tom Butts, but he looked a different man from the insolent Tom Butts they had seen that afternoon. His face was the color of ashes. His cheeks were sunken, and there was a look of dread and nameless terror in his eyes that once seen was never to be forgotten. He seemed to see nothing in the room about him, nothing but the yellow dispatch sheet. His companion spread it out on a table and he looked at it. His pale lips trembled as he tried to see it, but he could not read what was written there. He knew that, owing to his nervousness that afternoon, he had sent a heavy freight to meet the special on which Rossiter was coming. He could see in his mind's eye the bridge over the Ceriso with the river sparkling beneath it in the moonlight. He could see the special coming around the bend. It was a single track road across the Ceriso, and he had sent the freight through in the opposite direction. He could see the gleaming line of windows on the palatial special train, and its headlight sending its ray of light forward into the darkness. He could see the black, heavy freight coming in the opposite direction. They were to meet and crash together at the bridge.

"We can't telegraph anywhere to switch the train off," said the operator. "We have been trying all the stations. The operators all leave at five."

Butts knew that only too well. He groaned in his anguish of spirit.

The boys had been listening to this conversation in surprise. Not a word of it had missed Ted Strong. He knew what it meant. He knew that the train carrying Mr. Rossiter, and his girl friends, Louise and Daisy, would carry them to their death within the next two hours unless something were done. He knew how useless it would be trying to get any of the telegraph stations, as the operators all left at five and closed the stations, but another idea came into his head.

That morning he had been looking at a road map of the country about Ceriso. It was one he had secured from the government. There were government experts exploring the country about there and experimenting with the wireless telegraph. He knew that there was a wireless station back at Ceriso, for he had watched the government men putting it up and had looked over the instruments himself, being interested in telegraphy and electric work of all kinds. The road map he had in his pocket was marked with all the points where there were wireless telegraph stations. The other boys wondered what he was doing when he pulled it up out of his pocket and spread it out on the table.

For a moment he bent over it, examining it intently. Then he lifted his head.

"There is a wireless telegraph station on the railroad line twenty miles away," he said. "We can get a train there and signal to Ceriso to hold up the special."

Butts had fallen forward on the table, covering his face with his hands.

He was aroused by Ted Strong, who took him by the shoulder and shook him.

"Brace up," said Ted, "you must do something. I'll help you to head off this collision."

A faint gleam of hope came into the face of the train dispatcher at the words. He evidently did not recognize Ted, but he caught the meaning of what he said.

"Can you run an engine?" said Ted.

"Yes," said Butts.

"Then come on with me. I will fire for you. We have a run of fifteen miles to make, and we can take one of your yard engines. We can reach the telegraph station."

"Telegraph station!" Butts stood blankly and hurried forward a step. The same haunted look was in his eyes. Otherwise his face was a blank. The thought of the terrible wreck which seemed inevitable, and for which his carelessness was responsible, filled all his thoughts. He had sent that eastbound freight along that single line of track. The horrible mangling deaths that must occur at that lonely bridge over the Ceriso were his fault. He could think of nothing else.

"Wireless telegraph station!" said Ted. "The government telegraphers stay at them all night sometimes. There's a chance. It's fifteen or twenty miles away. There is no use trying to ride a horse there. But if you can get a locomotive and run it, I will fire it for you—all your firemen about the yards have gone home by this time—we may save this train. Pull yourself together. Try and understand."

Butts braced up a little.

"There is a locomotive in the yard now," he muttered; "if you do as you say we can make it."

All this time the two boys had been hurrying along the street. It was pitch dark, and they had now reached the loneliest part of the thoroughfare which ran from the Coronado Hotel to the railway station. The rest of the young rough riders had been taken by surprise by Ted's quick action. They had seen him dash out of the room, dragging Butts with him without understanding what had happened. The telegraph operator, who had brought the news of the impending calamity to Butts, soon explained to them what had happened. Kit Summers was the first to understand what Ted had in mind.

"Come on, fellows," he yelled, "we will run down to the station with him and see if we cannot help him!"

The rough riders dashed out to the street, but when they reached it the two boys they were after were far away.

Ted and Butts were within a hundred yards of the railroad station when two dark figures sprang out at them. One of them struck at Ted and sent him tumbling to the ground, and a moment later, in the darkness, Butts had been knocked over also.

Mike Hicks was carrying out the attack he had planned and in the darkness had taken his fellow conspirator, Butts, for one of the young rough riders!

Now, boys, we feel that you are very much interested in the adventures of Ted Strong and his dashing comrades and would like to finish this story. If so, we would advise you to get No. 24 of the Young Rough Riders Weekly, now on sale at all newsdealers. This library contains stories of the adventures of Ted Strong exclusively. Read one and you will read them all. Price only five cents per copy.

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